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2021.09.12 - Opinion

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[Opinion](#)[Television](#)

Ant and Dec, the kings of comfort TV, make it 20 in a row

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Ant McPartlin and Declan Donnelly celebrate their 20th win at the National Television Awards. Photograph: Anthony Harvey/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 11 Sep 2021 10.00 EDT

It's the winning streak that everyone has been talking about. For the 20th straight year, Ant McPartlin and Declan Donnelly have walked away with the [National Television award](#) for best TV presenter(s). "The first year we won an NTA, Tony Blair was the prime minister and Newcastle United qualified for the Champions League," said McPartlin in his acceptance speech. These awards are voted for by the public, and public love for the duo is yet to fade. From *SMTV Live* to *Pop Idol*, all the way through to *Saturday Night Takeaway* and *I'm A Celebrity...*, it is comforting that they are still here, still entertaining us, still in their prime.

Just as gardeners watch for signs that the seasons are changing, I sense a change in the air when television is about to make the shift from "sport etc" to comfort TV. It starts with the distant sound of the *University Challenge* theme tune and picks up when the small-screen blockbusters announce the dates that they will return. Soon, *The Great British Bake Off* will be back (21 September), as will *Strictly Come Dancing* (18 September), and eventually, when the balm of it is most needed, *I'm a Celebrity...* will appear, from Wales for the second year in a row. I am trying not to assume that many of us will be stuck indoors for the bulk of a dank, dark winter, but last year these competitions proved to be as comforting as Ant and Dec, and alleviated just a bit of the gloom.

No wonder comfort television won big at the NTAs. All three of those shows picked up awards, as did *Gogglebox* and *Line of Duty*. They are all programmes that people still watch together, and want to discuss, rather than furtively streaming on a phone while wondering if there really is anyone else out there with an opinion on season seven of [Alone](#) on Sky History.

Besides, I have been listening to [The Dropout](#) this week, the podcast that first appeared in 2019, in order to catch up on the Elizabeth Holmes/[Theranos affair](#), as Holmes's [trial continues](#) in the US. In one episode, prior to the scandal unfolding, when most of the world still thought of her as a world-changing tech pioneer, an interviewer asks Holmes if she

owns a television. She laughs, and says she does not. She works, from the second she wakes up to the minute she goes to sleep. I am not saying that if she set aside an hour for *Bake Off* every week she might not have gone the full Dr Evil, but I am leaving that thought with you, as I watch the trailer for the new series of *Strictly*.

Susanna Clarke's labour of love pays rich dividends



Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* was "written, nurtured and publicised during a long illness". Photograph: Sophia Evans/The Guardian

I feel lucky to have read Susanna Clarke's wonderful *Piranesi*, which won the [Women's prize for fiction](#) last week, without knowing a thing about it. I am yet to tackle Clarke's previous novel, *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, in part because it is a doorstep of a book. It looks heavy, and I used to do most of my reading on the bus or train. However, *Piranesi* blew me away. It is utterly extraordinary. Now it is a deserving prize winner, and with that sticker on its jacket, it will be everywhere, as it should be.

An emotional Clarke accepted the award at the ceremony last Thursday, explaining that *Piranesi* had been "written, nurtured and publicised during a long illness", and that she thought she would never be well enough to write

it. It took her 16 years. She said she hoped her win would inspire “other women who are incapacitated by long illness”. It brought to mind Hilary Mantel, who told the *Guardian* last week that her own poor health had made it difficult for her to work in a team and that, after adapting *The Mirror and the Light* for stage, she realised that she should have been writing plays “all my life”. Both achievements go beyond the traditional triumph of award winning, or finding one’s calling. Both are inspirational and deeply moving.

If you are yet to read *Piranesi*, I urge you not to find out anything about it, if possible, and to experience it without any context. It is one of the most unusual, brilliant stories I have ever come across and, unlike much in this world, it is best approached blindly.

Keanu Reeves, keep taking the tablets



Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss in *Matrix Resurrections*. Photograph: WARNER BROS.

Lovers of tiny sunglasses, massive leather jackets and Keanu Reeves’s entire existence should rejoice; the new *Matrix* film is almost upon us. [The trailer](#) for *The Matrix Resurrections*, the fourth film in the series and the first since 2003, was fed to the hungry lions of the internet last week and, contrary to what is usually expected from something so eagerly anticipated, it met

neither a collective eye roll nor disproportionate fury. It was broadly, if cautiously, embraced. It actually looks kind of, well, decent? We'll find out at the end of the year.

More importantly, it brings the notion of red pills and blue pills firmly back into the realm of fiction and attempts to wrestle them away from the darker symbolism they have assumed. (The old films' co-director Lilly Wachowski tried this back in 2020, interrupting online banter about "[taking the red pill](#)" between Elon Musk and Ivanka Trump with a [less-than-friendly retort](#).) The new poster features both the red and blue pills, which have had a glossy HD makeover from the original film. If you watch the infamous 1999 "choice" scene now, it looks like Morpheus is offering Neo to pick between two brands of cod liver oil.

- Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist
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OpinionEuropean Union

Europe's reputation as a cosmopolitan haven has been exposed as a mirage

Hans Kundnani



A map of Europe in the time of Charlemagne. Photograph: North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy

Sun 12 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

When Kabul fell in mid-August, almost the first reaction of European leaders was fear of another wave of refugees arriving on the continent. “We must anticipate and protect ourselves against major irregular migratory flows,” [said the French president](#), Emmanuel Macron. Armin Laschet, the Christian Democrat candidate hoping to succeed Angela Merkel as German chancellor in the election that takes place in two weeks, said [there could be no repeat](#) of the refugee crisis of 2015, when Germany received more than a million asylum seekers. By the end of the month, the European Council had

agreed to “[act jointly to prevent](#) the recurrence of uncontrolled large-scale illegal migration movements faced in the past”.

The focus on “protecting” Europe from an influx of asylum seekers reflects a troubling transformation of the [European Union](#) over the past decade. There was a time when “pro-Europeans” were confident that the world would almost inevitably be remade in the image of the EU, as it endlessly expanded its rules and exported its model centred on the “social market economy” and the welfare state. Since the eurozone debt crisis began in 2010, however, Europeans have become more defensive and now see the world largely in terms of threats.

Against this background, [Europe](#) also increasingly conceives of itself in cultural terms. As the European model has become less credible and compelling – in part because, led by Merkel, Europeans have hollowed it out in an attempt to become more “competitive” – “pro-Europeans” now talk endlessly of “European values”. Ursula von der Leyen’s “geopolitical” European Commission even includes a commissioner for promoting the European way of life (it was originally “protecting” rather than “promoting”), who is responsible for asylum and immigration issues.

When Macron became French president in 2017, he spoke of a Europe *qui protège* – “that protects”. This was initially, above all, about protecting citizens from the market; he hoped to reform the eurozone to create a more redistributive EU. But his plans were blocked, or rather simply ignored, by Merkel. Since then, under pressure from the far right and increasingly mimicking it, Macron has reinvented the idea of cultural, rather than economic, protection – in particular, from Muslims.

While the EU was based on learning the lessons of conflict within Europe, it never had anything to say about colonialism

“Pro-European” centrists such as Macron increasingly think of international politics in terms of a Huntingtonian “clash of civilisations” – but whereas Samuel Huntington saw the west as one civilisation that would find itself in conflict with China and Islam in the post-cold war period, they see Europe

as a civilisation that is distinct from, and which must also assert itself against, the United States.

The civilisational turn in the European project complicates the story of Brexit we have told ourselves. Leavers have often been portrayed as yearning for a white Britain before mass immigration began in the 1950s. But the reality is more complex. For example, one-third of Britain's black and Asian population voted to leave in 2016. As political scientist Neema Begum has shown, many did so because they saw the [EU as a “white fortress”](#) – and even those who voted to remain [tended not to identify as European](#). Continental Europe generally lags behind the UK in terms of racial equality – for example, Brexit dramatically reduced the number of [MEPs from ethnic minorities](#) in the European parliament. (There are no exact figures because member states such as France and Germany do not collect ethnic data.)

On the continent, “pro-Europeans” believe they have something in common with other Europeans that separates them from the rest of the world – they think of Europe as what the Germans call a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, or community of fate. Few remainers think in this way; many are genuine cosmopolitans. The problem is that they are often as ignorant of the reality of the EU as leavers are and support an imaginary EU rather than the real existing EU. In particular, many on the British left imagine the EU to be much more open and progressive than it really is. Michel Barnier, the EU’s [Brexit](#) negotiator and now a candidate for the Republican nomination in the French presidential election next year, last week called for a suspension of immigration from outside Europe.

It is particularly odd, when you think about it, that identifying with “Europe” should be thought of as an expression of cosmopolitanism. Europe is not the world and supporting the EU, or thinking of yourself as European, does not make you a “citizen of the world”, let alone a “citizen of nowhere”, as Theresa May famously suggested in 2016. Rather, it makes you a citizen of a particular region – one that happens to be the whitest on earth. In fact, historically, “European” and “white” were largely synonymous – think, for example, of what “European” meant in apartheid South Africa.

It is true that, after the Second World War, a new, more civic European identity emerged, at least among elites, that was centred on what became the EU. But it constantly drew on older ethnic or cultural ideas of Europe for legitimacy and pathos – for example, the most prestigious prize for “pro-Europeans” is awarded in the name of Charlemagne, the embodiment of a medieval European identity synonymous with Christianity. As even the term “pro-European” illustrates, civic, ethnic or cultural ideas of European identity were always being elided.

Moreover, while the EU was based on learning the lessons of centuries of conflict within Europe that culminated in the Second World War, and gradually also came to incorporate the collective memory of the Holocaust into its narrative, “pro-Europeans” did not even attempt to learn the lessons of what Europeans had done to the rest of the world and never had anything to say about the history of colonialism.

The EU has become more embattled during the past decade as the far right surges throughout the continent and increasingly sets the agenda for the centre right and even some centre-left parties, such as the [Danish Social Democrats](#). This means that the fragile civic identity that emerged during the postwar period seems to be giving way to a more cultural or even ethnic identity – defined, in particular, against Islam. In other words, whiteness may actually be becoming more, not less, central to the European project.

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[Opinion](#)[Social care](#)

The Observer view on the weaknesses of Boris Johnson's social care levy

[Observer editorial](#)



Boris Johnson steered the measure through parliament but criticism, from both the left and the right, is growing. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 12 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Boris Johnson's plan to "fix the crisis in social care" has arrived after 18 months of procrastination and decades of heartbreakingly bleak complaints from dementia sufferers and disabled people denied the care they need. A health and social care white paper is imminent, possibly before Christmas, that will explain how the crumpling patchwork of social care providers, most privately owned, will be knitted into the health system to provide a better service "once and for all".

As a precursor, [Johnson announced a levy](#) that he said would underpin the sector's funding and provide security for the next decade. [Fairness](#) is rightly a watchword of growing importance in politics and so the levy's primary test was the extent to which all sections of society will contribute towards a more integrated system of health and social care.

On that measure, [the levy fails](#), although not by as much as many feared when rumours surfaced that a hike in national insurance was all the Treasury would consider. As it is, £12bn will be raised from a 1.25 percentage point increase in employee and employer contributions from next April, accompanied by a 1.25% charge on dividend income and a 1.25% levy in 2023 on working pensioners who at the moment pay no national insurance.

At a glance, the combination of charges levied on workers and pensioners seemed comprehensive. [National insurance](#) is a progressive tax if a narrow definition is applied. That is because the £9,500 income threshold means someone earning £20,000 a year will pay the levy on only half their income, while someone on £50,000 will pay it on four-fifths.

All age groups are caught, after the levy was extended to cover pensioners who work – they will pay the 1.25 levy – along with those with stock market dividend income, mainly pensioners, when the 7% dividend tax rate increases to 8.25%.

However, this is where a sense of equity begins to break down. And the chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), the driving force behind the government insisting extra spending be financed through higher taxes rather than borrowing, is likely to discover its growing unpopularity once the implications begin to filter through.

Criticism by think tanks on both left and right of the political spectrum will have taken their toll

To some extent, they already are. The first polls are showing that the hike, which takes the overall proportion of tax as a percentage of national income above 35% and to a 50-year high, is proving unpopular. Criticism by thinktanks on left and right of the political spectrum will have taken their

toll. The [Resolution Foundation](#) said the levy [falls disproportionately on the working-age population](#) when a typical 25-year-old will pay an extra £12,600 over their working lives from the employee part of the tax rise, compared with nothing for most pensioners. Making matters worse, income from private pensions and rents will not be subject to the levy. A focus on class 1 national insurance also excludes the self-employed, thereby increasing the incentive for firms to use self-employed labour.

The taxpayers often grouped under the heading “the professional classes”, who earn more than the upper threshold for NI of £50,842, will be caught by the 1.25% levy, but will continue to be lightly taxed compared with those who earning less. The standard rate of NI is 12% and heading to 13.25%, while the upper rate is 2% and will be capped at 3.25%. It is shocking that a recent graduate earning more than £28,000 will from next year lose more than 48% of their earnings, including NI and their 9% graduate levy, while a 70-year-old on the same pay will contribute less than 24%.

Add to this what is effectively an [f86,000 tax](#) on the homes of those who need care – a charge that combines the worst of Theresa May’s “dementia tax” and a poll tax that pays ignores the value of homes in different parts of the country – and the plan begins to look toxic.

If a tax on incomes is necessary, it would be more equitable to increase income tax rates, although it would exclude employers from footing some of the bill. Fairer still would be a [tax on the assets of the wealthy](#) whose gains remain lightly taxed.

[Labour](#) appears to be inching towards this conclusion, but it knows to tread carefully after losing four elections on the trot at the hands of older voters who voted Conservative in part to protect their wealth.

A small tax on future gains from property, say 10%, could generate several hundred billion pounds

There is a coalescing around equalising the tax on capital gains with income tax rates. However, those richer members of society who can delay crystallising their winnings from stocks and bonds until more favourable

political times can reduce the receipts to a possibly one-term leftwing government. Better still would be to focus on the gains from property, which successive governments have protected from boom and bust through schemes such as Help to Buy, stamp duty holidays and low interest rates.

A small tax on future gains from property, say 10%, could generate several hundred billion pounds for the exchequer over the next 20 years. It is likely that a [tax on wealth](#) will be needed in addition to higher income taxes. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said an ever-growing NHS budget could swallow up all of the extra cash, leaving little for social care, which will receive [just £1.8bn](#) of the £12bn.

Tory county councils believe it will do little to alter a financial position that means they cannot provide services for 50% of social care claimants. Rather than a landmark package that reassures the care industry and health sufferers, it looks as though Johnson has left another job unfinished.

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[Opinion](#)[Afghanistan](#)

The Observer view on the Taliban and how they underestimate ordinary Afghans

[Observer editorial](#)



Kabul: ‘Afghans, especially the youthful majority, know their rights now. They know what freedom feels and sounds like.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sun 12 Sep 2021 01.05 EDT

The [fall of Kabul](#) in November 2001 was celebrated by rightwing British newspapers and commentators as something akin to Victorian imperial payback. Northern Alliance forces, backed by US and UK air strikes, swept the Taliban from power two months after al-Qaida’s 11 September terror attacks.

Now, 20 years on, Kabul has fallen again, and that silly, jingoistic triumphalism is placed in perspective. The west's victory was, at best, temporary and at worst, illusory. Despite its well-meant, ill-considered, vainglorious attempts to transform [Afghanistan](#) in its own image, the Taliban are back in charge. By some measures the situation is worse than in 2001.

The question – have the Taliban changed? – is on everyone's lips. In part, it's wishful thinking. If the Islamists have mended their ways and found wisdom in the wilderness, the sting of defeat may be mitigated for the humiliated allies. Yet the evidence suggests the [opposite is true](#). Taliban leaders still cling to old, [oppressive](#) ideas, they just have better PR. Reports, including from our correspondent in Kandahar today, are deeply troubling. House searches, arbitrary arrests, vengeance killings, beatings, property confiscations, intimidation, sexual harassment, and theft by Taliban foot soldiers are tokens of the new dispensation. Commanders cannot or will not rein them in.

The caretaker “[government](#)” announced last week is a men-only affair, comprising Pashtun hardliners linked to the 1996-2001 regime's old guard. Many are under UN sanction. Sirajuddin Haqqani, interior minister and notorious terrorist, has a \$5m (£3.6m) FBI bounty on his head. The son of the Taliban's founder, Mullah Mohammad Omar, is defence minister. Women, along with Hazara, Tajik and other non-Pashtun ethnic groups, are [out in the cold](#). The ministry of women's affairs has been abolished. The former “[ministry](#) for the propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice” has been re-established. Female civil servants are losing their jobs, [single mothers their children](#). Women may not walk the streets alone or play sport. Meanwhile, [respect for free speech](#) and free media, one of the great achievements of the past two decades, is being throttled. Reporters have been severely beaten for trying to do their jobs. Musicians may not be allowed to do theirs at all.

The answer to the question – have the Taliban changed? – seems obvious. But perhaps it's the wrong question. As the Islamists drag the country down, a more important question is: has Afghanistan changed? Individual acts of courage and public demonstrations speak to a mood of defiance among ordinary people that was less evident before 2001. They indicate a will to

resist. Afghans, especially the youthful majority, know their rights. They know what freedom feels and sounds like. They have expectations about education, careers, healthcare, travel, and a modern, connected economy in which banks function efficiently, the currency has value and there is food in the shops. They expect state help with Covid and a national drought.

All these rights, all these expectations are cruelly imperilled by bigoted, incompetent, corrupt Taliban rule, cynically propped up by China. How long can the Islamists ride roughshod with whips and guns before their control begins to slip? Many thousands of protesters rallied last week in Kabul and other cities after a call for a national uprising by anti-Taliban forces based in the northern Panjshir valley.

It's early days. The National Resistance Front, successor to the Northern Alliance, and its leader, Ahmad Massoud, is under fierce pressure. But despite regime claims, it has not been defeated and can expect growing public support. If history is a guide, Afghanistan may see another unstoppable insurgency but this time the Taliban will be on the receiving end.

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Observer comment cartoon

Conservatives

The Tory cabinet of mediocrities – cartoon

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[NotebookNew York](#)

Dismissed and derided when they stood, it's time to reassess the twin towers

[Rowan Moore](#)



Lower Manhattan, a fortnight before the 9/11 attacks destroyed Minoru Yamasaki's 'serene' towers. Photograph: Enrique Shore/Reuters

Sat 11 Sep 2021 12.30 EDT

Few buildings illustrated architecture's power to be different things to different people at different times than the twin towers of the World Trade Center. To their architect, Minoru Yamasaki, they were "a living symbol of man's dedication to world peace". The terrorists who destroyed them made them symbols of conflict. To a generation of New Yorkers, they represented the faceless civic-corporate bodies who razed a thriving and diverse district called Radio Row in order to build the towers. When I studied architecture, they typified vacuous modernism – the "largest radiators in the world", said one of my tutors.

Yet the Japanese-American Yamasaki was [dismissed by his contemporaries](#) for being "dainty", "prissy", "epicene", "ballet school", for example, on account of the slender gothic-looking arcades that ran around the bases of the towers. Now, looking at the old images republished with the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the towers look stately and graceful, magically capturing the changing light, serene counterparts to the frenetic city stretched out beneath them. Not to mention pillars of the world that changed for ever with their collapse.

Suspect methods



Packets of ivermectin in Argentina, where its use was growing earlier this year. Photograph: Roberto Almeida Aveledo/Shutterstock

On a bus shelter outside the British Library in London – and, for all I know, in other locations – there appeared last week a poster lamenting the effects of lockdowns on children. It looked convincing and official, with the logos of the UK government and the NHS at the base, but if you scanned a QR code between the logos you were taken to an anti-vaccine, anti-mask, anti-lockdown website. It was devious, in other words, in a way that seems characteristic of those who promote alternatives to official positions on the pandemic.

See also the arguments used to pitch ivermectin, a drug more often used to deworm livestock, as something that prevents Covid. These are based on studies that have credibly been called “[suspect](#)” or have been withdrawn over “[ethical concerns](#)”. To which methods the question is, if your arguments are strong, why present them in these ways? In this context, I prefer the direct language of the US Food and Drug Administration. “You are not a horse,” [it tweeted re ivermectin](#). “You are not a cow. Seriously, y’all. Stop it.”

Childish ideas



Britain's house builders should be able to do better than this. Photograph: Professor25/Getty Images/iStockphoto

"If you ask kids to draw a house, they'll draw the *Play School* house, with a door in the middle, windows each side and a pitched roof," says [Andrew Whitaker](#), planning director of the Home Builders Federation. He is trying to justify the ubiquitous products of the volume housebuilders whom his organisation represents, which roughly answer that description, though somehow without the charm of a child's drawing. I'd question how far one should take this idea of basing the adult world on infant perceptions: would anyone really want a child's idea of a car turning up at the school gate, still less for Mummy and Daddy to emerge from it, in the form of stick people with circles for faces and triangles for skirts?

Embarrassing pup



Jeff Koons' Puppy, at the Guggenheim, Bilbao, in full bloom. Photograph: Matteo Colombo/Getty Images

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao has [released a rap video](#) to help crowdfund the restoration of the large, flower-covered statue of a puppy by Jeff Koons that stands outside its Frank Gehry building. “It’s the ‘P’ with the ‘U’ with the ‘P’ with the ‘Y’,” goes the local musician MC Gransan. “So please don’t kill my vibe.” It is dad-dancing cringe-making. Also, since Koons’ net worth is reputed to be hundreds of millions of dollars, and the Bilbao puppy helped build his reputation, you would have thought he could look down the back of his metaphorical sofa for the €100,000 (£85,000) needed. It would save everyone embarrassment.

Rowan Moore is the Observer’s architecture critic

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[Opinion](#)[Crime](#)

Men are inventing new excuses for killing women and judges are falling for them

[Catherine Bennett](#)





Illustration: Dominic McKenzie/The Observer

Sun 12 Sep 2021 02.30 EDT

Although it takes some ingenuity to kill a woman and face no penalty whatsoever, the justice system continues to ensure that, for the right killing, in the right circumstances, the punishment – given the right judge – could still be a fraction of what you might expect.

Earlier this year, for instance, the five-year term for a man who blamed strangling his wife, Ruth Williams, on lockdown difficulties, confirmed that being married to your victim may actively – perhaps counterintuitively – heighten judicial compassion. Judge [Paul Thomas](#) thought Anthony Williams's mental state must have been severely affected, though this was contradicted by a psychiatrist. The court of appeal [refused to increase the sentence](#).

A shorter or sporadic relationship with the victim also offers hope. In May, Warren Coulton came before Judge Simon Picken for the manslaughter of Claire Wright. She had been asphyxiated in an episode of bondage during which her reluctance was recorded. Coulton, not seeking medical help, left her body for discovery by hotel staff. He got six years.

Yet more mercifully, you might think, [Sam Pybus](#) was last week sentenced to four years eight months for killing his intermittent sexual partner, Sophie Moss. She was 33, the mother of children aged five and six. In a victim statement, her [brother James](#) said: “We will never be able to shake the belief that whatever the nature of their relationship, and her role in it, that she was a victim, taken advantage of and exploited, and was subjected to an entirely avoidable and infinitely tragic end.” Its impact on the judge is presumably reflected in his sentencing.

Pybus, who was married, had driven to see Moss after drinking 24 bottles of lager, strangled her when they were having sex and, after finding her dead, waited in his car for 15 minutes before driving to a police station. Paramedics, when they were finally called, could not resuscitate her. Pybus claimed the choking had been consensual and that he did not remember killing Moss; the Crown Prosecution Service found there was insufficient evidence to prove he intended to kill her. A manslaughter conviction still carries a possible life sentence.

As Harriet Harman says, the four-year sentence for Sam Pybus sends out ‘the message that killing your girlfriend during sex is a minor matter’

What remains bewildering, even given the grand judicial tradition of sympathy towards men who hurt or kill female partners, is how Judge Paul Watson settled on a four-year sentence. You could easily conclude that unprovable claims about women’s sexual behaviour can still offset, at least in the average judicial mind, male culpability for extreme violence, callousness and recklessness.

The four-year sentence is less, [it has been pointed out](#), than Moss’s killer might have received for causing death by dangerous driving. It is shorter than those recently imposed on men for accidentally killing other men in pub fights. In fact, if the government fulfils its eye-catching scheme to treat pet abduction as an especially harmful property crime, which already carries a maximum seven-year term, the sentence could be dramatically less than a thief soon receives for taking somebody’s cockapoo.

Harriet Harman has asked the attorney general to consider whether the sentence was unduly lenient. The sentence fails, she wrote, to reflect the gravity of Moss's killing and the criminal's "cynical shifting of the responsibility from himself to her", while sending out "the message that killing your girlfriend during sex is a minor matter". The attorney general has confirmed that the sentence will be reviewed.

That this should be required so soon after politicians from across parties attempted to halt, via changes to the new Domestic Abuse Act, increasing defendant recourse to "rough sex" claims, suggests celebration over this victory may have been premature.

In fact, although Pybus killed Moss before the act took effect, it is unclear it would have made any difference, it being already established that a person cannot consent to their serious harm or killing. Nor can the wish for murder charges in such cases make this happen if the prosecution can't prove intent. Also unaffected by the Domestic Abuse Act, Pybus's short sentence constitutes, as Harman says, an actively harmful, trivialising statement on male violence against women. If it is not increased, maybe it, rather than government's restatement of existing law, should be understood as the official response to demands for justice by the admirable campaigning group [We Can't Consent to This](#).

Nothing, anyway, from the Pybus judge, seems likely to diminish the popularity of "rough sex" as just the [latest euphemism](#) whereby a case of male violence can be portrayed as something other than part of a relentless, gendered pattern. Women may sometimes agree to participate in the risky, coercive sex now depicted in mainstream pornography: they are the only ones who seem to die in it. In her important new book, *Feminism for Women*, Julie Bindel argues that old-style sexual assault is now dressed up by men as "sex-positive" experimentation. It spares them, she says, "the cognitive dissonance of apparently believing that 'consent matters' while proceeding on the basis that 'no' means 'convince me'".

Pybus's short sentence, which took into account expressions of "genuine" remorse, and an early guilty plea, could be seen as just a different expression of the misogyny that has encouraged defendant allusions to "rough" – as in

potentially lethal to women – sex. Certainly, it also contributes to a culture deeply desensitised to the [culling of women by male partners](#). Although less so, it turns out, to its rare opposite. Justice for Women draws attention to [Emma-Jayne Magson's](#) recent minimum 17-year sentence for the murder of her abusive boyfriend, who was – like the women above – deprived of medical attention. The judge, Jeremy Baker, regretted her lack of remorse.

Many of us feel the same way, funnily enough, about judicial behaviour over the years. Are any judges even a tiny bit sorry for the way their colleagues have indulged male violence against women? Right up to last week? It's not too late to ask for it to be taken into account.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/12/men-are-inventing-new-excuses-for-killing-women-and-judges-are-falling-for-them>

Observer lettersSociety

Letters: young and old, we're all in this together



The headlines in August 1980 show that baby boomers have not all had it easy. Photograph: Keystone/Getty Images

Sun 12 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

I am so glad Will Hutton has tried to bridge the irritating binary opposition between young and old that has infected the media for too long, and disappointed that he fails to do so (“[Baby boomers are the winners who have taken it all – now it’s time they gave some back](#)”, Comment). Distribution of wealth is by no means uniform. Too many old and young people are united in desperate poverty and consequent poor health; fewer share enviable wealthy lifestyles.

We need to dispel the illusion that so-called “boomers” lived lives of unshakable stability. Postwar generations feared nuclear war, faced

unbearable levels of unemployment as our manufacturing base diminished (Remember UB40's One in Ten?). The 1980s depression was long and deep: many families were separated as their wage earners got on their bikes in search of work. Schools had none of the IT resources they have now, and no one had mobile phones, laptops etc.

We all now share the challenges of the 2020s. I would rather that we brought our government to account for failing to level up than attack any generation based on political media-manufactured generalisations.

Yvonne Williams
Ryde, Isle of Wight

As a member of the baby-boomer generation, I do like the idea of a Baby Boomer Trust Fund proposed by Will Hutton. I would be happy to leave money to such a fund as long as it were possible to ensure it is ringfenced and adequately protected from interference by those motivated by self-interest. Also, you'd need a different name for the fund if we are to move away from unhelpful labels that support inter-generational divisions.

Erica Burch
Hastings

One class, fewer planes

An immediate and low-cost solution to reduce the number of planes flying would be to remove first and business class and have only one standard (“[The six problems aviation must fix to hit net zero](#)”, the New Review). A single standard class would allow more seating, so instead of 10 planes flying the Atlantic, perhaps only nine would be required, for the same number of passengers. The many celebrities who support climate change action would also be able to demonstrate their commitment by sitting with everyone else.

Irvin Slater
Bo'ness, West Lothian

Rewilding with caution

Rewilding the UK's intensified farmland appears desirable but such initiatives must be undertaken with care ("[Seed money: the millionaire rewilding the countryside, one farm at a time](#)", Focus). In the first instance, the diversion of UK farmland towards nature conservation needs to be assessed against wider impacts for global biodiversity. It is vital that the transfer of productive farmland to nature reserve or "park" status does not encourage needless food imports. Conservationists should be wary of narrow local or national biodiversity gains if these effectively export industrial, agricultural intensification to other global regions to the detriment of indigenous groups, small farmers and biodiversity alike.

Rewilding the land "one farm at a time" by pulling individual units out of production is unlikely to reverse our nature crisis alone. The entire agricultural sector needs ecological recalibration. For every potential rewilded farmstead, many other farms are being driven down the route of even greater industrial intensification through nefarious market, policy and corporate influences.

Instead of a rewilding philosophy that encourages artificial separation between food production and biodiversity, we should encourage conservationists and progressive farmers alike to adopt and globally sustainable measures. The application of genuine ecological approaches towards farming can produce good food and wonderful biodiversity in equal measure.

Ian Rappel, Real Farming Trust
Talgarth, Powys

Crippling costs of care

You rightly highlight the crippling costs for elderly patients needing carers at home ("[We need a fair tax to provide free social care for everyone](#)", Editorial). You quote the Alzheimer's Society as estimating that "someone with dementia typically spends £32,000 a year to receive the care they need" ("[Pressure grows on Starmer to back tax on rich to pay for care](#)", News). This is a significant underestimate. For my bedridden wife I pay a care agency about £52,000 a year and there are agencies that charge more. In addition, I have to buy various necessities costing several hundreds of

pounds more. I am advised that when one's assets sink to £23,000 local authorities may fund a lower standard of care as they are cash strapped.

The case for providing free care is irrefutable. A government cap on agency charges will not solve the problem, especially as the cap is likely to be set high. However they do it, the necessary funding must be made available urgently.

Derrick Phillips
Coulson, London

PM's poor record on climate

Nick Cohen questions whether Boris Johnson is a secret climate change denier ("[Climate change deniers are as slippery as those who justified the slave trade](#)", Comment). While attributing any convictions other than self-advancement to the prime minister is a fool's errand, it is important to take account both of his past comments and his sources of advice.

As London mayor, he promoted the views of climate change-denying Piers Corbyn and adviser to climate sceptics Matt Ridley, who, as Cohen notes, opined that climate change has done more good than harm. In 2007, Johnson argued that the real issue facing the world was not global warming but overpopulation. Given his personal efforts in that regard, the prospects for Cop26 under his leadership are hardly encouraging.

Dr Anthony Isaacs
London NW3

Compassion in death

Three cheers for Miriam Margolyes and even more cheers for Margaret Branch, the therapist who confided in her ("[It was my duty to tell truth about Du Pré's death, says Margolyes](#)", News).

Ten years ago my son died. He had been suffering with a virulent strain of non-remitting MS for several years and, when he could no longer move from his bed to his wheelchair, decided that he did not want to go on. He knew

that there was no cure and that his condition could only deteriorate. He starved himself to death. This was harrowing for him and for his family.

We should allow people in their right minds to choose when and how to die when they know that there is no cure for their condition. Margaret Branch was showing love.

Primrose Kirkman

Warminster, Wiltshire

WFH: what happens next?

So, Seámas O'Reilly, be careful what you wish for ("[Are you office ready?](#) – the WFH widow", the Observer Magazine). Which is it: a new wife or a new home?

Pam Woolgar

Kirkby Lonsdale, Lancashire

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For the record UK news

For the record

Sun 12 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

An article ([Science project reveals high lead levels in schools' water](#), 5 September, page 21) should have given the lead quantities in micrograms, not milligrams, which is the unit usually represented by the “mg” abbreviation used.

Due to an editing error, a piece about wind power said that turbine blades were made of steel ([Gone with the wind: why UK firms could miss out on the offshore boom](#), 5 September, page 50). While much of the rest of the structure is steel, the turbine blades are typically fibreglass reinforced with carbon fibre.

An arts review described the Kistefos Museum as “Oslo’s answer to Tate Modern”; it is in fact in Jevnaker, about an hour’s drive north of the Norwegian capital ([Cups and sorcery](#), 5 September, New Review, page 28).

Other recently amended articles include:

[NHS gender identity clinic whistleblower wins damages](#)

[Coroners warned of mental health care failings in dozens of inquests](#)

[A lust for life ... my years backstage with the giants of punk](#)

[Tearful Naomi Osaka questions future after US Open loss to Leylah Fernandez](#)

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[Opinion](#)[The Wire](#)

In an age too given to moral certainty, let's remember The Wire's Omar as a study in complexity

[Kenan Malik](#)





‘A man gotta have a code’: Michael K Williams as Omar Little in The Wire.
Photograph: HBO/Allstar

Sun 12 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

It’s not often that a shotgun-wielding thief and killer comes to be seen as possessing a moral core. But then it’s not often that you have a character like Omar Little. Or an actor like Michael K Williams to bring him to life. Or a TV series like *The Wire* that allowed both character and actor to breathe.

The [death last week of Williams](#), possibly of a drugs overdose, has robbed us of one of the most subtle, supple actors of our time. He was outstanding in a number of roles, from *Boardwalk Empire* to *Bessie*, from *The Night Of* to *The Road*. But it was his portrayal of Omar Little that truly lives in the memory.

The Wire was one of those TV shows that broke the rules of what TV should be, in terms of tone, narrative and pacing, “a television show that thinks it’s a novel”, as the *New York Times* suggested. But it was much more than that. There are few works in any medium that have more successfully burrowed beneath the skin of our age, exposing that spot where race, class, power and despair coalesce to entrap the human spirit and curdle the American dream.

[“Swear to God, it was never a cop show,”](#) insisted David Simon, who, with his co-writer Ed Burns, was the driving force behind the programme. It was, rather, a set of intricately connected stories about the people we now call the “left behind”, and whom Simon then called the “excess Americans”: steelworkers and longshoremen, street dealers and heroin addicts, the unemployed and the barely employed, all chewed up by a system that cared only to preserve itself. People crushed by a police force more interested in order than in the law, a city hall that sipped corruption with the morning coffee, unions more decayed than the industries they once dominated, an education system that taught despair, a media that missed the real stories. “World going one way,” as Poot, a low-level dealer in one of the drug gangs, puts it, “people going another.” And all this wrapped up in the form of a policier.

This was the backstory to Trumpism and to Black Lives Matter told more than a decade before either happened – the first episode of *The Wire* was broadcast in June 2002. The story, too, of how black rage and white rage was forged and how they interlaced. Almost two decades on, there is still little, fictional or factual, that tells that story like *The Wire*.

He is often described by critics as a kind of “Robin Hood” figure. He isn’t. He is much more demanding of the viewer

Cop shows are about good and evil. That distinction is their raison d’être, even in those that blur the lines. *The Wire* eschewed that whole approach to morality. And never more so than in the figure of Omar Little.

The Wire was an ensemble show, myriad characters woven in and out of stories as the series progressed. But from within that ensemble, Omar came in many ways to express the heart of the show. Orphaned at a young age, raised by his religious grandmother, he became a stick-up man, whose speciality was robbing, and often killing, drug dealers.

He is often described by critics as a kind of “Robin Hood” figure. He isn’t. He is much more demanding of the viewer. Robin Hood inhabits a myth that, like the modern cop show, derives its power from a given framework of

good and bad. In *The Wire*, though, morality is something people have to construct out of the vicissitudes of their lives.

One of the defining scenes comes in season two, when Omar is giving testimony in court against a drug dealer known as Bird, who is charged with murder. Bird's attorney, Maurice Levy, kept on a retainer by drugs organisations, wants to know why anyone should believe Omar. "You are amoral, are you not?" he asks him. "You are trading off the violence and despair of the drug trade. You are a parasite that leeches off..." "Just like you, man," interrupts Omar. "Excuse me, what?" asks a shocked Levy. "I got the shotgun. You got the briefcase," Omar replies. "It's all in the game, though, right?" It's an exchange that can be read as an endorsement of nihilism. That there is no morality, just power and corruption. That everyone is simply out for themselves. But that's not how the scene works, given the whole arc of *The Wire*. What Simon and Burns show us is that people who find themselves in impossible situations are forced to work out for themselves what is rational and moral within their circumstances. What may seem from the outside, from those who make the rules of "the game", as irrational and immoral is, for those trapped by the system, the only way to weigh up good and bad in the settings in which they find themselves.

Omar is a stone-cold killer. And yet we have great sympathy for him because we can see that he is trying, in his own way, to bring some moral order into his universe. "A man gotta have a code," as he says. "Don't get it twisted, I do some dirt too," he acknowledges, "but I never put my gun on no one who wasn't in the game."

Omar is also openly gay. It's a fact both incidental to the storyline and also central to it, subverting by its very presence traditional norms of black masculinity.

We live in an age in which we are drawn to seeing everything in black and white, in which those who disagree with our moral vision are often shunned as recusants or bigots. In such a world, the presence of a figure like Omar Little reminds of the complexities of our moral lives, and of the difficulties of fashioning norms by which to live within the exigencies we inhabit.

The Wire was an indictment of a world in which, in Simon's words, "the rules and values of the free market... have been mistaken for a social framework" and in which "institutions are paramount and human beings matter less". But it's also a celebration of resilience and of the ability of ordinary people in the most desperate of circumstance to carve out a little space of humanity. Michael Williams died far too young, but in Omar Little he gave flesh to a character who still illuminates our lives in all its contradictions and complexities.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Sally Rooney](#)

So Sally Rooney's racist? Only if you choose to confuse fiction with fact

[Nick Cohen](#)



Sally Rooney has a new novel out so she has moved into the sight lines of the rich world's commentariat. Photograph: Linda Brownlee/The Guardian

Sat 11 Sep 2021 14.00 EDT

Social media did not create informers and liars. The malicious have always manufactured denunciations and the literal-minded have always confused nuance with sin. The web is simply supercharging one of those dismal moments in history when wilful ignorance and active malice are rewarded rather than disdained.

In optimistic times, one can almost sympathise with character assassins. In *Normal People*, [Sally Rooney](#) has her female lead think, "cruelty does not only hurt the victim, but the perpetrator also, and maybe more deeply and more permanently". The victim may get over it. The abuser must always live with the knowledge that they are a thug.

Rooney published *Normal People* in 2018 as cancel culture was turning from a sideshow into a fiery inquisitorial movement. If its perpetrators are "more deeply and more permanently hurt" than their targets, the pain does not slow the delivery of half-truths and outright falsehoods for a moment.

Rooney provides an example of how spite dresses itself in the clothes of virtue. Because she has a [new novel](#) out, she has moved into the sight lines of the rich world's commentariat. With so much competition, how can one attention-seeker stand out? Today, there is a ready-made answer: suggest your target is racist. Even when the accusation is demonstrably false, such are the levels of fear in the "progressive" west that editors and readers will find all kinds of excuses for biting their tongues.

The [Sydney Morning Herald](#), whose [code of ethics](#) boasts that it has "no wish to mislead" and "no interest to gratify by unsparing abuse", ran a long attack on Rooney. Its commentator, Jessie Tu, spends an age bragging about how brave she is for defying the consensus that Rooney is an interesting writer and then announces, "*Normal People* should be called White People because, in Rooney's world, people like me don't exist. In the book, Asians are mentioned only as tourists who choke the pathways of museums in Italy.

‘I don’t know why we’re bothering with Venice – it’s just full of Asians taking pictures of everything’, one of the male characters whines.”

The plainest of plain stupid errors a critic can make is confusing an author with her characters

I was reading the novel when the piece appeared, and found the anti-Asian sentiments. They come from an odious man, Jamie. Rooney portrays him as a spoilt, sadistic rich kid. His casual racism is wholly in character. The plainest of plain stupid errors a critic can make is confusing an author with her characters. The *Herald*'s critic does precisely that. I read on and wondered if something more than ordinary stupidity was on display. In the book, Jamie is instantly upbraided. A man lunching with him says: “God forbid you might have to encounter an Asian person … it’s kind of racist, what you just said about Asian people.”

The apparent malice here is in the seeming assumption that an author is her characters, coupled with an omission of inconvenient evidence from the text. The charge of racism is allowed to linger so that the book can be portrayed as the story of “two white, able-bodied, beautiful straight people mulling about how hard it is to be white, able-bodied and straight” (which isn’t true either).

Occasionally, when I try to talk about progressive witch-hunts, I am met with the response that I should focus my energies on the malign actors with real power on the right. I do, and accept it is true that in England, but not in Nicola Sturgeon’s Scotland, authoritarian conservatives have more power than their progressive counterparts, and use it to purge the BBC and government bodies of any dissident voices.

Yet this is not much of a rebuke. You should be able to oppose the worst of the left and the right simultaneously. To argue that you are justified in your selective ethics because you are the moral equivalent of Boris Johnson is no argument at all.

In any event, power’s ability to harm is relative. It depends on where you stand. In most of the liberal culture industries the fear of public shaming by

progressives is far greater than the fear of state punishment. It's one thing if the shaming is justified but what follows when the denunciations are false?

These are almost impossible questions to answer today. Human resources departments and police forces would never give researchers wanting to separate the true from the false complaints access to their files. However, the opened archives of the dictatorial states of the 20th century provide clues to the consequences of allowing denunciation to flourish without regard to truth.

Public political outrage can provide a cover for taking on the competition or for simple jealousy

Historians who investigated the files of [the Gestapo](#) in Nazi Germany estimated that personal malice motivated 40% of denunciations to the secret police: wives who wanted husbands out of the way so they could be with their lovers (and vice versa) and workers taking office politics to the extreme. You hear faint echoes of this today. In the [highly competitive publishing market](#), public political outrage can provide a cover for taking out rivals or for simple literary jealousy. In one delicious case in the United States, an author who cancelled his contemporaries for appropriating gay themes had to withdraw his own book when it was accused of appropriating the Serbian mass murders of Balkan Muslims and using them as a backdrop for a cute love story.

In the UK, many authors have noticed the silence of literary organisations, staffed by minor cultural bureaucrats. They are meant to defend writers without fear or favour but have failed to condemn the waves of [death](#) and rape [threats directed at JK Rowling](#).

Research from Communist East Germany, covering the 44 years from the fall of Hitler in 1945 to fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, is as suggestive. The historian Hedwig Richter wrote about how [East Germans informed](#) on one another, without being asked to, and when they had no legal obligation to snitch. Their accusations gave them the hope that the state would look kindly on them and they could “avoid potential problems and misunderstandings in the future”. That urge to please is the less dramatic but

more lasting danger of heresy hunts on the left (and the right). Frightened people go along with them for fear they will be condemned as heretics if they do not. The result is a culture that appears self-confident on the surface but is sterile and conformist underneath. You don't have to look far to find it. It is all around you.

- Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist
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- [Coronavirus Booster jabs not necessary for all in UK, says Dame Sarah Gilbert](#)
- [Live UK Covid: widespread booster injections are not needed, says Oxford jab scientist](#)
- [China Boris Johnson accused of deliberate ‘strategic void’ to prioritise trade](#)
- [Diplomacy Biden: US and China must not ‘veer into conflict’](#)

Vaccines and immunisation

UK Covid booster not necessary for all, says Oxford jab scientist Sarah Gilbert



Prof Dame Sarah Gilbert: ‘I don’t think we need to boost everybody. Immunity is lasting well in the majority of people.’ Photograph: Andy Paradise/REX/Shutterstock

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Fri 10 Sep 2021 03.25 EDT

One of the leading scientists behind the Oxford vaccine for Covid-19 has said she does not support a widespread booster jab campaign in the UK as immunity among fully vaccinated people is “lasting well”.

Prof Dame Sarah Gilbert, who developed the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab, one of the most widely used Covid vaccines in the world, suggested extra doses should be directed to countries with a low rate of vaccination.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has said the Pfizer and AstraZeneca jabs are safe to use as boosters, but the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has yet to give its advice to ministers.

Gilbert's comments came as data was presented to the JCVI that indicated a top-up Pfizer vaccine dose several months after a second jab greatly boosted the body's immune response to Covid-19, according to [the Times](#).

Gilbert told the [Daily Telegraph](#) that elderly people and those with weakened immune systems should be in line for a third jab, but "I don't think we need to boost everybody".

"As the virus spreads between people, it mutates and adapts and evolves, like the Delta variant," she said. "With these outbreaks, we want to stop that as quickly as possible. We will look at each situation; the immunocompromised and elderly will receive boosters. But I don't think we need to boost everybody. Immunity is lasting well in the majority of people."

Gilbert has previously highlighted the wide disparity in vaccination rates between different countries, suggesting jabs should be sent to those areas where availability is low to vaccinate everybody once, rather than some people three times.

She said: "We need to get vaccines to countries where few of the population have been vaccinated so far. We have to do better in this regard. The first dose has the most impact."

The JCVI is expected to give its advice on who should receive a booster shot within days. It has already said a third dose should be offered to people with severely weakened immune systems.

The UK culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, told Sky News on Friday the government had committed to starting the booster programme in September and it would begin this month.

"We will start the booster programme later in September. We're just awaiting the final JCVI advice on exactly who will be getting that booster

and the exact criteria for that.

“I don’t know exactly when the JCVI are going to make their announcement. But we’re committed to it in September so I would expect it very shortly.”

Responding to Gilbert, Dowden said: “There’s a range of opinion among scientists that’s why we have JCVI to give us the authoritative advice and we’ll follow that advice.

“In terms of other countries, we’ve committed to 100m jabs going by 2022. We’ve already delivered 9m, so it’s not an either or. We’re doing both of those things.

“Pretty much all nations are looking at a booster programme. Israel are already doing it. We’re not an outlier on this.”

The JCVI is looking at the latest data from the Cov-Boost trial run by University Hospital Southampton. The £19.3m UK clinical trial is testing the Pfizer jab alongside those from AstraZeneca, Moderna, Novavax, Janssen from Johnson & Johnson, Valneva and CureVac.

The study aims to answer key questions such as whether people who have had two doses of AstraZeneca may get more benefit if they have a third dose of Pfizer.

The new MHRA guidance says Pfizer boosters can be given to anyone, regardless of which doses they had previously. However, AstraZeneca boosters will only be given to those who previously had the AstraZeneca jab.

The latest government data showed that up to 8 September, 48,344,566 people had received a first dose of vaccine, a rise of 25,131 on the previous day, while 43,708,906 had received both shots, an increase of 87,960.

The government said a further 167 people had died within 28 days of testing positive for Covid-19 as of Thursday, bringing the UK total by that measure to 133,841.

As of 9am on Thursday, there had been a further 38,013 lab-confirmed Covid-19 cases in the UK, the government said.

Prof Sir Andrew Pollard, the director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, said the world needed to “turn the tap on” to fight the “fire” of coronavirus internationally.

“At this moment there is a fire raging all around the world with huge pressure on health systems in many, many countries,” he told the BBC’s Today programme.

“At the G7 meeting in early June there were very substantial pledges of money and of vaccines. A lot of that money has flowed, so Covax is now in a very good position to start buying their fire hoses for that fire.

“What we really need is to turn the tap on and get the water to those countries, and we need that to happen today.”

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Coronavirus

UK Covid: Welsh first minister expects infections to peak at end of month as news awaited on booster jabs – as it happened

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Foreign policy

PM accused of deliberate ‘strategic void’ on China to prioritise trade



The report urges the government not to pursue a free trade agreement with China at this time. Photograph: Arthur Edwards/The Sun/PA

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor

Fri 10 Sep 2021 01.01 EDT

Boris Johnson has been accused of avoiding a clear strategy on China for fear it will force him to make difficult decisions that put human rights ahead of enhanced trade with the world’s second largest economy.

The allegation of a “strategic void” is made in a major report on the future of UK-China relations by the House of Lords’ international and defence select committee.

It warns that given the trajectory of China's global ambitions, the UK must be prepared for a "potentially long and severe period of disruption in its trade and political relations with China". The Conservative-chaired committee warns this new realism about China and its goals requires a depth of understanding of the country across the UK government that is currently lacking.

The report, full of insight from former ministers and defence chiefs, points to "inconsistencies, uncertainty and lack of a central strategy" in UK government relations with China.

It says: "There is no clear sense of what the current government's strategy towards China is, or what values and interests it is trying to uphold in the UK-China relationship."

After questioning ministers and China experts, the committee concluded: "It seems that the government is using a policy of deliberate ambiguity to avoid making difficult decisions that uphold the UK's values but might negatively affect economic relations."

Any strategy that is published should put the trade-off between economic engagement and human rights at the centre of the discussion, the report says.

The peers found that among its witnesses "the general consensus was that the government has been vague in how it plans to balance economic relations with China with upholding the UK's values, and is using this ambiguity to attempt to 'have its cake and eat it too'."

The report urges the government to be more explicit that China represents a threat to the west, and is not just, as UK ministers claim, a systemic rival.

They say their inquiry had "conclusive evidence that China poses a significant threat to the UK's interests, particularly in light of the government's announced tilt to the Indo-Pacific region. Tensions over Taiwan, China's desire to reshape the international rules-based order in its own interests, its attempts to restrict freedom of navigation, and its assaults on human rights extending even to genocide all pose serious challenges to

our security and prosperity – including to our international trade and investments over the longer term.”

This will require the UK government to do more to protect the international trading architecture, as well as UK infrastructure, even if this means coming into conflict with China and provoking what it describes as potentially severe and extended disruption to trade and cooperation. The report says “both the government and the private sector must be prepared to manage such periods of stress”.

The report urges the government not to pursue a free trade agreement with China at this time, and questions whether the government has thought through the implications of its tilt to the Indo-Pacific, including the dispatch of a carrier strike group to the South China Sea. It says it is not clear how a UK security presence is to be maintained in the medium term without cooperation with allies including France.

The report warns: “Even if not planned, there is a strong risk that future rhetoric from China will at some point provoke a major conflict. The ‘tilt’ to the Indo-Pacific implies that the UK will be less able to isolate itself from such an event. It needs to carefully consider its contingency plans.

“With the future presence of the Royal Navy in the South and East China Seas, it is not impossible that a UK naval vessel (rather than the US fleet) could be used by China as the test of their sovereignty, and therefore the start of such a conflict.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/10/pm-accused-of-deliberate-strategic-void-on-china-to-prioritise-trade>

[China](#)

Biden tells Xi US and China must not ‘veer into conflict’



A White House statement said Xi Jinping (left) and Joe Biden discussed ‘areas where our interests converge, and areas where our interests, values and perspectives diverge’. Photograph: Nicolas Asfouri/AFP/Getty Images

[Vincent Ni](#), and [Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

Fri 10 Sep 2021 08.39 EDT

Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart, [Xi Jinping](#), have spoken in their first phone call for seven months, amid continuing tensions between the world’s two largest economies.

During the 90-minute call, which was initiated by the US president, the two leaders discussed their shared responsibility to ensure competition does not “veer into conflict”, according to a [readout](#) from the White House.

The statement said the two leaders had “a broad, strategic discussion” including on “areas where our interests converge, and areas where our interests, values and perspectives diverge”.

It said Biden and Xi agreed to engage “openly and straightforwardly”.

“This discussion, as President Biden made clear, was part of the United States’ ongoing effort to responsibly manage the competition between the United States and the PRC,” the statement said.

[A Chinese readout](#) said the conversation was candid and in-depth. “Whether China and the US can handle their relationship well bears on the future of the world. It is a question of the century to which the two countries must provide a good answer,” said Xi, according to the readout.

Xi allowed his officials to work with their US counterparts to “continue their engagement and dialogue to advance coordination and cooperation” on the climate emergency, Covid-19 response and economic recovery as well as on significant international and regional issues, but added that they should be “on the basis of respecting each other’s core concerns”.



Bilateral relations between two of the world’s most significant powers have plummeted since the Trump administration. Photograph: Jewel

Samad/AFP/Getty Images

Analysts in Washington said there has been ongoing frustration in the US that efforts to find common ground had so far been fruitless. They said China's increasing aggression in the South [China](#) Sea and Taiwan strait, and the growing presence of the US and its increased support of Taiwan, had also increased concerns over the prospect of conflict.

China for its part accused the US of interfering in its domestic affairs by politicising issues such as Hong Kong and Xinjiang – both China's territories. Some Chinese commentators went as far as to suggest the US was attempting to contain China.

Recent efforts to progress relations have stalled. Last week, John Kerry met China's foreign minister, Wang Yi. Kerry told reporters he had urged Wang and the Chinese delegation to do more on the climate crisis, which was more important than politics.

Wang, however, countered that bilateral climate cooperation “cannot be separated from the wider environment of China-US relations,” and that Washington should “stop viewing China as a threat and a rival” and “cease containing and suppressing China all over the world”.

He added that the US saw the two sides’ joint efforts against global heating as an oasis. “But surrounding the oasis is a desert, and the oasis could be desertified very soon,” he said.

The two leaders also discussed the issue of the climate emergency in their latest call. The Chinese readout said Beijing had “taken the initiative to actively shoulder international responsibilities befitting China’s national conditions”.

03:22

'Deep concerns': US and China trade criticisms at Alaska meeting – video

Bilateral relations between two of the world’s most significant powers have plummeted since the Trump administration. [A high-level meeting in March](#)

including Wang, China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, and the US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, also descended into hostile public rebukes.

According to the White House, Biden initiated Thursday's call. A senior administration official told the Associated Press the White House had been unsatisfied with early engagements with China.

The official, who was not authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, said White House officials were hopeful that Xi hearing directly from Biden could prove beneficial.

The White House official said Biden made clear to Xi that he had no intention of moving away from his administration's policy of pressing China on human rights, trade and other areas where it believed China was acting outside international norms.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/10/joe-biden-xi-jinping-us-china-phone-call-veer-conflict>

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Karen Gillan: ‘You should have seen my fight routines when I started – I looked like spaghetti’



Karen Gillan ... ‘I definitely went out and had fun, but never consecutive nights.’ Photograph: Danny Moloshok/Reuters

[Cath Clarke](#)

Fri 10 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

Karen Gillan's house in the US is, she says, "like a little piece of Scotland in Los Angeles". She is sipping coffee in her living room. The wallpaper behind her is a forest of brown, beige and mallards. When Vogue shot here last year, it described Gillan's taste in interiors as "quirky". "Yeah," she sputters. "It's all old trinkets."

A piece of Scotland in Los Angeles is not a bad description of Gillan herself. Born in Inverness, she has lived in LA on and off for years. It's a love-hate relationship. "I never feel settled here. It's a real issue of mine." Whenever she's in LA, she gets the feeling that it's not where she's meant to be. Then she flies off and makes a film. "I come back and think ..." – she does a cartoonish swooning sigh – "... It's nice to be home. Then in a week I'm like: I've got to move."

Gillan has yet to acquire the gloss and poise associated with Hollywood's rich and famous. Today, she's wearing a brown hoodie, massive gold hoop earrings and no makeup. Of all the celebrities I've interviewed on video during the pandemic she seems least bothered about flattering camera angles or how she looks on screen: leaning over her laptop like she's Zooming with a mate.

People rave about the LA lifestyle, but she's not convinced. "I'm like: what, the sun? Well, I'm ginger, so rule *that* out. And I don't drive, so I can't get about. I mean I can take Ubers." Actually, she has just started learning to drive; she has lesson two this morning right after our interview. She got through the first months of lockdown in LA with her puppy, Turtle, a bull terrier-poodle mix: "The love of my life."

Gillan seems most comfortable nattering away like this, with a stream of self-deprecating banter. Her sense of humour is often up there on screen too, beginning with her breakout role playing Doctor Who sidekick Amy Pond. Gillan moved to the US for Oculus, a supernatural thriller from the Paranormal Activity producers. Then came her role as the cyborg Nebula in the Guardians of the Galaxy, followed by the Jumanji franchise. She pulled off that unicornish transition from teatime telly to Hollywood, then in 2017

went home to Inverness to shoot her writer-director debut, *The Party's Just Beginning*, a funny-downbeat indie.

Gillan is the first to own up to being fiercely ambitious. As a kid, she rampaged around the house with a video camera: making horror movies. Throughout her teenage years, she was interested in one thing: acting. At 15, she wrote to every agent in Scotland. “I was just really laser-focused on making it happen because it’s not like I had any family or friends in the industry.” Her mother worked in a supermarket, her father in a care home for people with learning disabilities. “Being from a place that feels really really far away from London, it’s not like you could just fall into all this. You have to make it happen for yourself.”

In her early 20s, she partied averagely hard. But the drive never waned. “I definitely went out and had fun, but I remember only ever allowing myself to party once a week, never consecutive nights.”



Gillan in *Gunpowder Milkshake*. Photograph: Studiocanal/Reiner Bajo/Allstar

The one Los Angeles habit that Gillan has picked up is fitness. At school, she was good at running, but that was it. “I’m a terrible dancer, so not great at [fight] routines.” After a few action films, she has improved. “I’ve

definitely got better. You should have seen me when I started; I just looked like spaghetti.” At her screen test for Guardians of the Galaxy, she remembers being asked to fight in front of a green screen. “It must have looked hilarious, just limbs flying around. They were like: ooookay, you’ve got the role, but you need to learn to fight.”

Now she’s got the exercise bug. “That sort of changed my life because I’d never worked out before. I’d never eaten healthily in my life. I didn’t know how to do it. I would happily eat McDonald’s, chocolate, crisps, Tesco sandwiches. It wasn’t healthy at all. I can’t believe the way I used to go on.”

For her latest role in Gunpowder Milkshake, she slipped into full-on action-hero mode. The movie feels like a cross between John Wick and Kill Bill – in one fight scene Gillan bites the ear off an adversary. She arrived on set fresh from shooting the new Jumanji film where she’d trained with the Mission Impossible team. “I was raring to go with my nunchucks, and I was in OK shape, but this whole other level of action.” She plays Samantha, an assassin hired by “the Firm”, a secretive association of men in suits led by Paul Giamatti. When an assassination goes wrong, Samantha goes on the run with an eight-year-old girl. Then her hitwoman mum (played by Game of Thrones’ Lena Headey) who walked out 15 years previously, makes an appearance.

Gillan says she wanted to inject her character with a bit of emotion and vulnerability. “I felt as if I had seen a lot of assassins who are softly spoken and stoic. I wanted to do something different.” It also gave her the chance to dive into the psychology of the character. She would have loved to be a therapist, she says. “That itch gets totally scratched in my job.” For this part, she researched abandonment issues, the impact on a child in later life of a parent vanishing from their lives. Gillan mimics the director’s panicked face when she brought up her research: eyebrows raised in mock alarm. “I reassured him: don’t worry, it’s still going to be fun.”

I’m starting to wonder. Maybe I need to be a bit more exciting

Gunpowder Milkshake is a popcorn movie set in a stylised neon-lit alternate universe populated by gangsters and hired killers. The big shootout finale

takes place inside a library that doubles as a weapons depot (the books of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf are lent out with guns and flick knives hidden inside). A trio of supercool librarian-hitwomen (played by Michelle Yeoh, Angela Bassett and Carla Gugino) join mum and daughter in combat against enough male goons to fill a football stadium. Is the film a reaction to #MeToo and Time's Up, tapping into female rage?

Yes and no. “It wasn’t something that we necessarily spoke about. I think we all felt like it was definitely representing a movement that has been happening recently.” What she liked about it was the idea of bringing women together. “It’s a really really positive thing that’s come out of the whole Time’s Up movement, that women are being heard in a way they weren’t before.”

In 2018, Gillan joined female attenders wearing black to the Baftas in support of the Time’s Up movement. Has she ever experienced misogyny herself at all in her career? She shakes her head. “No. Not directly. But, honestly, hearing those stories was enough to support the movement.” I half-wonder, perhaps unfairly, whether she would tell me if she had. While she’s chatty and fun company, spend an hour with her and what you notice is a certain reserve, a carefulness never to say anything too personal or revealing.



‘I could understand people’s reactions ...’ Kevin Hart Dwayne Johnson, Karen Gillan and Jack Black in in Jumanji: The Next Level. Photograph: Hiram Garcia/AP

One thing I notice when I’m researching is that for someone who shot to fame in her 20s, Gillan clung on to her privacy. There’s never been a Daily Mail story about her falling out of a taxi or staggering bleary-eyed out of an afterparty. “I’ve noticed that, too!” She throws herself back on the sofa with a laugh. “I’m starting to wonder. Am I living my life the right way? There is nothing. Maybe I need to be a bit more exciting.”

Though Gillan did find herself at the sharp end of a minor feminist backlash in 2017 when images emerged of her character in Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle dressed in the teensiest of shorts and a top no bigger than a sports bra (while her male co-stars wore jungle-appropriate khakis). She stands by her defence that the images reflected the casual sexism of video game culture back in the day. “I could understand people’s reactions. But I don’t have any regrets at all. It’s a fun film, and we were making a comment on the fact that women were dressed like that in those 90s video games. It felt like there was more substance to it. I don’t think my stance has changed too much.” Funnily enough, she was thinking about this earlier, reading one of those body-positive articles advising women in their 20s to wear bikinis 24/7. “I thought: maybe this is something I can show the grandkids. Like: ‘Granny really had it.’ Or maybe that’s weird.” She giggles. “Maybe I shouldn’t show the grandkids.”

Gillan made her name in Hollywood blockbusters. It’s interesting that when wrote and directed her first film, The Party’s Just Beginning, she went back to Inverness and shot a drama about depression and suicide. Did that reflect her taste in film more than the acting roles? “I actually probably act in more action films than I watch,” she says. “Though as I’ve gotten older, I’ve started to appreciate more of a pure popcorn movie. When I was going through my 20s, I was quite serious with my cinema choices, which I cringe at now. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve understood the value of escapism and cinema. I was watching just the most depressing films.” Who was her favourite director? “Michael Haneke! I was not messing around with the depressing.”

Gunpowder Milkshake is in cinemas and on Sky Cinema from 17 September

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Experience: a stranger secretly lived in my home



‘My first thought was, if they wanted me dead, I would be dead.’

Photograph: Kevin Serna/The Guardian

Amber Dawn

Fri 10 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

In 1995, when I was 20, I moved to Enumclaw, a farming town in the US state of Washington, to be close to my brother and his family. I rented an apartment. My room was on the top floor but on my first night, lying in bed, I heard footsteps above me. Over the months, I started to notice things going missing. I would buy a six-pack of soda, drink one, come home from work and find only four left. It was the same with packets of soup and ramen noodles. I also noticed that doors I had left open were closed, or vice versa.

Mostly, I found it amusing – I assumed that my brother, who had a key, was coming over and eating my food. (Looking back, I should have known it wasn't him because there would have been dirty dishes everywhere.)

I got a puppy. While she was being toilet-trained, I kept her in the bathroom. One day, when I was out, the apartment flooded. I came home to find the puppy in the sink. She was tiny. I didn't know how she could have got up there unless someone had put her there to save her.

I continued to hear footsteps. There was a hatch in the ceiling, leading to what I assumed was an attic. I asked my landlady if there was any way someone could be up there. She said, "No way, it's probably a squirrel or raccoons." I pushed it out of my mind.

Then one day, I called in sick to work. I lay on the couch all day and at 11pm, turned off the lights, lit a candle and ran a bath. As I lay in the water, I noticed the attic hatch was open. Suddenly, everything slowed way down. What took about 30 seconds felt like five minutes. All the puzzle pieces fell into place: the footsteps, the food, the puppy – someone was in my apartment.

My first thought was, if they had wanted me dead, I would be dead. They had had access to me for six months. I assumed it must be a man, or someone tall enough to get up there without a ladder.

I knew I had to stay cool and not scare him in case he hurt me. I walked naked to the bedroom to get my robe, passing the mirrored closet I suspected he was hiding in. Then I went to the kitchen, got a hammer out of the junk drawer for protection and called my sister-in-law. I whispered, "I think there's someone in my house." She said, "Get out now, I'm on my way."

Three minutes later, she was outside. We went back to her house and called the cops. They didn't find anybody, but there was a nest of stuff in the attic: a sleeping bag, some food and a book (they never told me what he was reading). Next day, I told my landlady I was moving out and gave her a copy of the police report, which noted "signs of a possible intruder".

For years, the experience haunted me. When I was at home alone, I felt as if I was being watched. I lived somewhere else with an attic hatch and asked the landlord to put a lock on the outside.

The house I live in now, in Illinois, doesn't have an attic, thankfully. I live there with my husband and two children, a dog and two birds. Sadly, my puppy was hit by a car two years after I moved out of that Washington apartment. I often think she was the only one who saw what was going on.

The stranger was never caught. The police had no idea what the intruder was doing there. It was a quiet town with no visibly homeless people.

I have sympathy for the intruder; there was no malice. And, honestly, he was the best roommate I ever had. He kept to himself, was quiet and always put the toilet seat down.

I could never be certain, but I think I saw him once. I was coming out of my apartment to go to the grocery store and there was a guy in his mid-30s with reddish hair, just sitting there – as if he was waiting for something. He looked at me for longer than is socially acceptable and I thought it was weird. When I came back from the grocery store, he was gone. I thought nothing of it, but now I wonder... maybe he knew all about me.

As told to Ellie Harrison

Do you have an experience to share? Email experience@theguardian.com

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A screengrab from a handout military drone video shows a smoke cloud from the compound of the Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Syria after a US forces raid on 26 October 2019, conducted under the post-9/11 Authorisation for Use of Military Force. Photograph: Dvids Handout/EPA

[9/11: 20 years later](#)

How 9/11 led the US to forever wars, eroded rights – and insurrection

A screengrab from a handout military drone video shows a smoke cloud from the compound of the Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Syria after a US forces raid on 26 October 2019, conducted under the post-9/11 Authorisation for Use of Military Force. Photograph: Dvids Handout/EPA

by [Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Fri 10 Sep 2021 05.15 EDT

Over the past few weeks, the Biden administration has launched drone strikes against suspected terrorist targets in Somalia and Afghanistan, based on congressional authority dating to September 2001. This week, [five terror suspects](#) have been in court for pre-trial hearings now entering their ninth year in Guantánamo Bay, which opened its prison gates in January 2002.

The aftershocks of 9/11 are everywhere. The families of the nearly 3,000 victims are still struggling with the justice department to [lift the secrecy](#) over the FBI investigation into the attacks and the possible complicity of Saudi officials. Last week they asked the department's inspector general to look into FBI claims to have lost critical evidence, including pictures and video footage.

As the US approaches the 20th anniversary of 9/11, it is clearly not just about history. More than a decade since the last attempted al-Qaida attack against the country, America's society and its democracy are shaped – and arguably badly corroded – by how it responded in the first few weeks after the twin towers fell.

The Authorisation for Use of Military Force (AUMF) that became law on 18 September 2001 was supposed to give the president the tools he needed to combat al-Qaida. But it is still used as the legal underpinning for drone strikes and other military operations ordered by Joe Biden around the world, most with nothing to do with al-Qaida.

The torture of suspects carried out by the CIA and allowed by legal memos issued by the Bush administration has mired the case of the 9/11 suspects at Guantánamo in tainted evidence, leaving the prosecution unable to move forward or abandon the process.

New books argue that lines can be drawn tracing the spread of disinformation on the internet and the direct challenge to democracy posed by Donald Trump and his supporters – culminating in the 6 January insurrection – all the way back to decisions taken in the febrile atmosphere that followed the attacks on New York and Washington two decades ago.

Their conclusion echoes what civil liberties organisations have been saying for the past two decades, that 9/11 is America's auto-immune disease: the response did far more damage than the original attack.

"The betrayal of America's professed principles was the friendly fire of the war on terror," Carlos Lozada, the [Washington Post](#)'s non-fiction book critic, wrote this week.

The AUMF was passed by Congress on 14 September 2001, three days after the attacks. It gave George W Bush, who subsequently signed the measure into law, a mandate to hunt down all those who "planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 or harbored such organizations or persons". The authorisation was not limited in time or space.



Barbara Lee, the only member of Congress to vote against the Authorisation for Use of Military Force in 2001. Photograph: Adam Traum/AP

Amid all the calls for vengeance, only one member of Congress voted against it, the California Democrat Barbara Lee.

"Let us pause for a minute and think through the implications of our actions today, so that this does not spiral out of control," Lee warned at the time. "As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore."

In the subsequent 20 years, the 2001 AUMF has been invoked more than 40 times to justify military operations in 18 countries, against groups who had nothing to do with 9/11 or al-Qaida. And those are just the operations that the public knows about.

It has broadly been interpreted as being applicable to Islamic State but the full list of groups and individuals targeted by the AUMF is secret. It is the founding text of the “forever war”.

A separate AUMF was passed in 2002 for Iraq, which is heading towards repeal, but America’s top general, Mark Milley, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, told Congress the “2001 AUMF is the one we need to hang on to”.

Within days of the AUMF’s passage, the Bush administration submitted the USA Patriot Act, which gave the FBI and other agencies broad new powers to collect phone records and other communications of terror suspects. A bipartisan alternative with more constraints was brushed aside, and the bill was rushed through a vote before most members of Congress had even read it.

In January 2002, the Guantánamo Bay camp was opened on a US-run sliver of Cuba, with the intention of keeping terror suspects in indefinite detention beyond the reach of the US legal system. Many of the inmates had been swept up on the Afghan battlefield and sold to the US for bounties by opportunists who insisted they were al-Qaida.

The last transformative act of the post-9/11 era was the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in June 2002. It was a totally new body that blurred the edges between policing, intelligence and immigration. Even the word “homeland” was jarring, with its echo of European-style “blood and soil” nationalism.

The first head of the bureau of immigration and customs enforcement (Ice) under DHS oversight was a federal prosecutor, Michael Garcia, who hailed the arbitrary roundup of immigrants from Muslim countries after 9/11 as an “exercise in disruption”.

Ice used the counter-terrorist urgency of the DHS's founding to step up its drive against mostly Latin American immigrants. In 2005, it carried out 1,300 raids against businesses employing undocumented immigrants; the next year there were 44,000. That fabricated link between terrorism and immigration was the driving force between Donald Trump's election campaign, the "Muslim ban" he ordered on taking office and his fixation on building a wall on the southern border.



The 1995 Oklahoma bombing did not produce a war on terror response in the way that 9/11 did. Photograph: Anonymous/AP

Spencer Ackerman, the author of *Reign of Terror: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump*, argues that the amorphous "war on terror" supercharged and institutionalised enduring strands of white supremacism running through US political history.

Ackerman, a former Guardian journalist, contrasts the political response to the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, by the white supremacist Timothy McVeigh, to the al-Qaeda plane hijacking attacks six years later.

In the Oklahoma case, Republicans in Congress disputed any suggestion of wider complicity of the far right. To the extent anti-terror legislation was

strengthened, it was directed against foreign groups. Patriotism was identified with whiteness.

“One of the most important lessons of the war on terror is that a white man with a flag and a gun is told by the culture of the war on terror that he is a counter-terrorist, not a terrorist,” said Ackerman, adding that a direct line can be drawn between the war on terror and the 6 January pro-Trump insurrection in Washington.

“You can see from the iconography of who is in that crowd, who’s storming the Capitol,” Ackerman said. “There are a lot of people in hard-knuckle gloves and tactical gear basically cosplaying as the warriors that the war on terror and its media portrayals convinced them is the mark of valorous American behavior.”

Some of the excesses of the 9/11 era have been pruned. The National Security Agency is more constrained in its ability to collect bulk phone data, which was ruled illegal by a federal appeals court last year. The Patriot Act has been overtaken by the less ambitious USA Freedom Reauthorization Act.



Armed men stand on the steps at the Michigan state capitol after a rally in support of President Donald Trump in Lansing on 6 January 2021.

Photograph: Paul Sancya/AP

But even after laws expire, the habits and reflexes of the 9/11 era remain. Karen Greenberg, the director of the centre of national security at Fordham University school of law, calls them “subtle tools”: secrecy, deliberately imprecise legal language aimed at expanding executive power, blurred lines between government agencies, and the overturning of norms. “You can get rid of all these policies, but if you don’t get rid of the tools that created those policies, forget it. It doesn’t matter,” Greenberg said.

“All these things that were created in the name of national security, we’ve seen them time and time again bleed into things that are not about the war on terror and national security.”

Her book *Subtle Tools: The Dismantling of American Democracy from the War on Terror to Donald Trump* argues that the 45th president took advantage of the rupture of norms and the ballooning of presidential power in the 9/11 era in his own assault on democratic institutions.

“This wilful evasion of the limits on presidential power is something we are going to have to figure out how to address sooner rather than later,” she said.

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‘Maybe the guy’s a masochist’: how Anthony Fauci became a superstar



‘I have not known anyone with more humility in my lifetime’ ... Anthony Fauci at the NIH in Bethesda, Maryland. Photograph: Visko Hatfield/National Geographic for Disney+



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Fri 10 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Beer and bobbleheads. Candles, colouring books, cupcakes and cushions. Dolls, doughnuts, hoodies, mugs and socks. T-shirts and yard signs that declare “Dr Fauci is my hero” and “In Fauci we trust”.

[Anthony Fauci](#), an 80-year-old scientist, doctor and public servant, has become an unlikely cult hero for millions of people during the Covid pandemic.

The phenomenon says much about his devotion to saving lives, as well as his willingness to listen and his role as a candid truth-teller. But it also reveals much about the US, a polarised country where face masks and vaccines have become as controversial as abortion and gun rights – and where [science itself is under siege](#).

“At the core of Tony’s popularity is that people intuit that this is a man who is speaking the truth and will not let anything stand in the way,” says John Hoffman, the co-director of a new documentary, [Fauci](#). “Tony is the signal

amid the noise. People are able to sense that there's a lot of noise and their ears are trying to find the signal and Tony is the signal.”



Cult hero ... a yard sign in Rockport, Massachusetts. Photograph: Brian Snyder/Reuters/Alamy

The film begins with a split screen: the Fauci of today and the Fauci of four decades ago walking the same journey to his desk. It is a portrait of a man whose career has spanned seven US presidents and been bookended by the two great pandemics of the past century: HIV/Aids and Covid.

In both cases, he has been a lightning rod for public emotion: revered as a hero by some, reviled as a villain by others. Janet Tobias, the film’s other director, says Fauci has a “grounded charisma”: “He was forged in the Aids pandemic and he was tested in the Covid pandemic.”

Fauci worked at his parents’ pharmacy while growing up in Brooklyn, New York. It was an unpretentious childhood where you did not get intimidated, he says in the film – “or, as we used to say, you didn’t take shit from anybody”.

He took up clinical medicine during an internship and residency at the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, then arrived at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, as a clinical fellow in 1968.

In 1981, Fauci turned his research focus to early scientific reports of a mysterious disease that at first had stricken gay people, intravenous drug users and people with haemophilia. It would become known as Aids.

In one of six interviews he gave to the film-makers, Fauci is seen fighting back tears as he recalls an Aids patient who lost their sight. Asked why it still affects him, he pauses, clenches his jaw and says: “Post-traumatic stress syndrome. That’s what it is.”

By 1984, he had become the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), a position he still holds. A self-confessed workaholic, he had little time for romance.

But one day, the film recounts, he was treating a Brazilian man who could not speak English. [Christine Grady](#), a nurse who had spent two years in Brazil and spoke Portuguese, was summoned to act as an interpreter. Fauci asked her to tell the patient that his ulcers were not completely healed, so, if discharged, he would have to keep his legs elevated and change the dressings frequently.

‘The signal amid the noise’... watch the trailer for Fauci.

But the patient, who had spent months in hospital, said “no way” and vowed to go to the beach every day and go dancing at night. “I sort of gulped and thought: what the heck am I going to do now?” Grady says. She decided to assure Fauci that he would do exactly what he said.

“A day later, I saw Dr Fauci in the hallway. He said to me: ‘I’d like to see you in my office,’ and I was certain that I was caught and going to be either reprimanded or fired.” In fact, he asked her to dinner.

The couple married in 1985 and have three daughters. The documentary offers a rare insight into the impact on his family of his 12-hour-a-day, six-day-a-week work schedule. “I wouldn’t say I neglected the raising of the children, but I did not sacrifice professional things as much as maybe I should have,” he says. “I was not going to every soccer match, every track meet, every swim meet. Chris did everything.”

The Faucis did have a rule, however, about always eating dinner together as a family, no matter how late at night. His eldest daughter, Jenny, recalls with good humour him arriving home only to start dancing with her mother, even as the kids were desperate to eat.

Some viewers who light Fauci candles or eat Fauci cupcakes might be surprised to learn from the film that he was condemned as a “murderer” by HIV/Aids activists in the late 80s and early 90s for moving too slowly to find treatments. Protesters outside the NIH are seen holding placards that read “Dr Fauci, you are killing us”. Some burned him in effigy or carried a mock-up of his head on a stick.



‘I was not going to every soccer match, every track meet. Chris did everything’ ... Fauci with his wife, Christine Grady. Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

Peter Staley, an HIV/Aids activist since his diagnosis in 1985 and a participant in the film, recalls in a phone interview: “He was the de facto head of Aids research for the US government and we were very unsatisfied with how that research effort was going. We felt the Aids clinical trials group Tony set up at NIAID had major problems and wasn’t finding the drugs we needed to prolong our lives, so we had major issues with how he was running research there.”

Fauci heeded the anger and wondered what he was missing. In October 1989, he ventured into the lions' den of a meeting with the biggest activist group, [Act Up](#), and listened to its members' concerns.

Steven Wakefield, a human rights and HIV/Aids activist, recalls by phone: "It revealed who he was. Most individuals, when you get in their face and say: 'You're wrong, you're a killer, you're the worst person on the planet,' will walk away. What it said was: 'That's not who I am. I'm going to go into a place and tell them who I really am and listen to why they've come to believe I could be such a monster.'"

It was a display of humility that changed the way clinical trials were done, recognising the limits of the scientific establishment and bringing diverse populations into the process. This lesson of community engagement was applied to clinical trials for Covid, ensuring the inclusion of African Americans, Latinos and other groups.

People were looking for someone they could trust, who would be their guide. He represented that

Janet Tobias

Fauci won the respect and friendship of Aids activists such as Staley, who remains an adviser to him in the Covid pandemic and says: "I almost think our friendship has got a hefty side of S&M to it. I love the guy, but half the time I'm very frustrated with him and almost furious at times, including the past two years during Covid."

"I'm an activist, so I tell him in very blunt terms on almost a weekly basis what my frustrations are and it doesn't seem to diminish the friendship; if anything, it strengthens it. That shows a character that very few people have. I find it pretty extraordinary and I call it S&M because maybe the guy's a masochist. I don't know. I'm beating him up on a pretty constant basis."

Covid proved to be, in Fauci's words, a "diabolical repeat" of the Aids crisis. This time, it was his misfortune to be working on a White House taskforce under Donald Trump, who [waffled over mask wearing](#), pushed unscientific

cures and played down the danger, insisting the virus would disappear “like a miracle”.

As ever, Fauci is circumspect on camera, making clear that he disagreed with the president, but abstaining from fruity language. But what were those toe-curling televised briefings like for Staley to watch? Did he fear that his friend was dying inside?

“To watch him have to stand behind some real craziness was kind of uncomfortable. Those are the conversations where I started getting angry and I started pushing him to resign from the taskforce, saying: ‘You can’t be standing behind him when he says “China virus” any more.’

‘I think he showed that he’s really a classy guy’ ... Brad Pitt as Fauci on Saturday Night Live.

“Thankfully, after Trump did the bleach thing [suggesting that disinfectant could be injected as a cure for Covid], there were no more instances of Tony having to stand behind Trump, so that problem kind of went away. But, yeah, it was painful. The great news is that on 20 January this year, Trump was gone and Tony was still at his desk.”

Suddenly, in the twilight of his long and storied career, Fauci found himself thrust into the limelight: a bulwark of truth against Trump’s mendacity and torrents of online misinformation. He became ubiquitous on television, magazine covers and merchandise. Thousands of people signed a petition to make him People magazine’s “sexiest man alive” and he was played by Brad Pitt on the late-night comedy show Saturday Night Live.

The sketch was a perfect illustration of the circular nature of fame and how Fauci finds himself at the centre of it. When TV interviewers had asked him lightheartedly which actor might best play him in a film, he had joked that it should be Pitt. SNL duly delivered, with Pitt sitting behind a doctor’s desk wearing a grey wig, Fauci specs and a Fauci tie. Imitating Fauci’s voice, Pitt introduced clips of Trump by saying: “Tonight, I would like to explain what the president was trying to say – and remember, let’s all keep an open mind!”

Pitt earned an Emmy nomination and [the sketch has been viewed more than 14m times on YouTube](#). Fauci himself said: “I think he showed that he’s really a classy guy when, at the end, he took off his hair and thanked me and all the healthcare workers.”



‘It’s amusing, it’s interesting, but you can’t take it seriously’ ... Fauci on his celebrity. Photograph: Visko Hatfield/National Geographic for Disney+

Perhaps it was inevitable that, after entertainment and politics became indistinguishable from one another (the host of *The Apprentice* was elected president), the same would happen to scientists caught in politicians’ orbit.

Among the satirical foils for Fauci is Larry David, who plays a curmudgeonly version of himself in the improvisational comedy series *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Both are gravelly voiced Brooklynites of the same generation with no airs and graces. Fauci says in the film: “I was a kid from Brooklyn, and Brooklyn to Manhattan is like New York state to Rome.”

When Fauci had to deal with Trump, he faced countless socially awkward situations reminiscent of those that befall David’s on-screen persona. At one White House press briefing, the president attempted humour by calling the state department “the deep state department”. One YouTuber zoomed in on

Fauci's reaction – despairing glance downwards, hand to forehead – and added the Curb Your Enthusiasm theme music.

Fauci could not be accused of shunning his cultural currency. In April last year, he held a private video call with more than 30 celebrities including Orlando Bloom, Kim Kardashian West, Mila Kunis, Ashton Kutcher, Gwyneth Paltrow, Katy Perry and 2 Chainz.

Fox News appears to have made him enemy No 1 and it's getting absolutely insane. The death threats are unrelenting

The hour-long call was reportedly Kardashian West's idea and allowed those taking part to ask anything they wanted about Covid. Fauci told CNN that he did it because the celebrities had "megaphones" and "could get the word out about staying safe" to their huge followings on social media.

To his critics, it looks like another example of Fauci's extravagant ego trip. To his admirers, it was evidence of his shrewdness as a communicator. Wakefield says: "This film shows you that he's someone who has done the work, who has integrity around what he's saying and is not seeking fame. I have not known anyone with more humility in my lifetime."

In the documentary, Fauci himself says about celebrity: "It's amusing, it's interesting, but you can't take it seriously, because then you'll start thinking that you're something that you're not. However, built into that are some fun things."

What explains his sudden ascent to national treasure – and heart-throb – status? "People were really looking for someone they could trust, who would be their guide," suggests Tobias. "He represented that, because he was communicating on a daily basis about Covid."

"I often thought, being around him, that there were aspects of America that were like being in a gigantic, digital Roman forum. You had a situation where there were people who were encouraging the crowd to throw roses and then encouraging the crowd to throw garbage. Tony happened to be the person who entered the Roman forum and had to deal with all that in a

digital age, where it is so amplified and takes on characteristics that you couldn't have imagined in Rome."



Workaholic ... Fauci at the NIH. Photograph: Visko Hatfield/National Geographic for Disney+

Fauci's unexpected celebrity comes with a dark side in a country where more than 80 million people are still unvaccinated and there are [furious clashes over mask mandates in schools](#), even as the Delta variant sweeps through the US and [kills 1,500 people a day](#).

Fauci personifies this divided, hyperpoliticised US, joining Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton as [a bogeyman for the anti-science, conspiracy theorising right](#). Says Bill Gates: "This phenomenon, just telling the truth, has made him an enemy and a rock star all at once."

Trump frequently assails him and is particularly obsessed with mocking Fauci's poor ceremonial first pitch at a baseball game. Crowds at the former president's rallies respond to Fauci's name with bilious demands of: "Lock him up!" The Republican senator Rand Paul has sent [a criminal referral on Fauci](#) to the justice department. The Republican congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene has proposed a "[Fire Fauci Act](#)".

The doctor was given a security detail after receiving death threats. In the film, he is seen on the phone in summer 2020 complaining to Staley: “These fucking dark web people are really getting bad; they’re really harassing Chris. One of them called up violent threats eight times today on a cellphone ... They’re harassing my daughters constantly, which really bothers me more than anything else.”

Staley was among those who hoped the worst was over with the end of Trump’s presidency. But he says by phone: “It’s gotten twice as bad since the last year. Now, Fox News [appears to have] made him enemy No 1 and it’s getting absolutely insane. The death threats are unrelenting. They arrested a guy a couple of months ago that made horribly threatening emails and was not far away. I do think it’s weighing on him now.”

But Fauci has had a thick skin since his childhood days in Brooklyn and those disquieting years as the public enemy of HIV/Aids activists. When someone attacks, his instinct is not to immediately fight back. As he says in the film: “Using The Godfather as the great book of philosophy, it’s nothing personal. It’s strictly business.”

Fauci is released in the US on 10 September and in the UK on 17 September

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2021.09.10 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: Biden's vaccine mandate for 100 million workers; Los Angeles requires students to be vaccinated](#)
- [Covid booster jabs UK ministers hope vaccines watchdog will back mass rollout](#)
- [UK More than 8,000 people in hospital with Covid](#)
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Covid news as it happened: case rates rise in 92% of UK's local areas; Greece introduces fines for issuing fake vaccination certificates

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Coronavirus

Ministers hoping vaccines watchdog will back mass rollout of booster jabs



A healthcare professional draws up a dose of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

[Peter Walker](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 14.38 EDT

Ministers have piled pressure on the vaccines watchdog to approve a large-scale programme of Covid booster injections in time for winter, as the number of people in hospital with the virus [exceeded 8,000 for the first time since March](#).

On Thursday the UK's medicines regulator granted emergency approval for the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines to be used as third shots to tackle potentially waning immunity, also putting pressure on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) to approve a new jab programme.

Hours later, the health secretary, Sajid Javid, said he was confident that such injections would begin imminently. “We are heading towards our booster programme,” he said. “I’m confident that our booster programme will start later this month, but I’m still awaiting the final advice.”

The JCVI is expected to announce imminently whether it has approved boosters, and if so on what scale. Members of the committee, which advises UK health departments, met virtually for more than four hours on Thursday and were briefed on interim results from the [Cov-Boost study](#).

While the study’s results have not yet been made public, they were cited as supporting evidence by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in its emergency approval of the vaccines to be used as boosters.

Javid and ministerial colleagues are believed to be impatient to begin a mass rollout of booster jabs, as has already happened in Israel. However, the JCVI could disagree; it has described the issues under discussion as complex and containing numerous ethical implications.

One of the leading figures in the development of the Oxford AstraZeneca jab, Professor Dame Sarah Gilbert, has said a mass coronavirus vaccine booster campaign may not be necessary.

Immunity was “lasting well” for most people, she told the Daily Telegraph on Friday, and suggested extra doses should be directed to countries with a low rate of vaccination.

The JCVI has already [approved third jabs](#) for around 500,000 very clinically vulnerable adults and older children. Even if it does approve boosters, it could decide that these should initially be limited to older adults, or those with other health conditions.

Last week the JCVI [declined to approve](#) the use of Covid vaccinations for all 12- to 15-year-olds, something also strongly sought by ministers, instead expanding the use of jabs for those in the age group with severe health conditions.

The decision to withhold mass vaccinations for older children could still be reversed by a review of wider evidence by the chief medical officers of the four UK nations, which is also due to report imminently.

The MHRA's announcement stressed that while it had approved booster vaccines in principle, it remained the JCVI's decision over how, if at all, they could be used. "This is an important regulatory change as it gives further options for the vaccination programme, which has saved thousands of lives so far," said Dr June Raine, the MHRA's chief executive.

"It will now be for the JCVI to advise on whether booster jabs will be given and, if so, which vaccines should be used."

While some scientists welcomed the MHRA's move, others questioned whether it was ethical to provide millions of extra jabs to people with existing immunity when so many people worldwide had not yet received any vaccinations – a consideration that is not in the JCVI's remit.

"By any standards this is good news," said Danny Altmann, a professor of immunology at Imperial College London. "As we see in daily breakthrough caseload, Delta has really stress-tested our defences. While UK cases are held down to about 40,000 a day as we head into autumn, there's clearly little room for complacency. Data from Israel has already shown clearly that a third dose can enhance protection substantially to bring breakthroughs right down."

But Prof Andrew Hayward, the director of the UCL institute of epidemiology and healthcare, suggested that while the announcement was good news for countries with a plentiful supply of jabs, it could have downsides when it comes to fair distribution of vaccines around the world.

"Those who have had any doses of vaccine will be at much lower risk of severe Covid-19 than those who have had none – so whilst the booster dose is likely to further increase protection in those receiving it, the dose would save more lives if given to someone in a country who has not yet had the opportunity to get any doses," he said.

“This is one reason not to consider a general, whole-population approach to booster doses, but to focus on those who are most vulnerable – [such as] the elderly and those who are extremely clinically vulnerable – who were also vaccinated earlier and have therefore had longer for antibodies to wane.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/09/uk-medicines-regulator-approves-covid-vaccines-for-use-as-booster-shots>

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Coronavirus

More than 8,000 people in hospital with Covid in UK



The 8,085 people in hospitals across the UK represents a 6% increase on the previous week. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 14.28 EDT

More than 8,000 people in the UK were in hospital with Covid on Wednesday – the highest figure for nearly six months – leading to fears of a resurgence in the virus' ability to cause serious illness and death among the population.

In countries with high rates of vaccination, such as the UK, fewer people are predicted to become ill enough to require hospital treatment, even if infection rates remain high. But the latest figures show the highest number of patients on wards since 10 March.

The 8,085 people in hospitals across the UK represents a 6% increase on the previous week.

Nevertheless, the figures are still well below those recorded at the peak of the second wave. On 18 January, 39,254 patients with Covid-19 were in hospital – the highest at any point since the pandemic began.

Hospital numbers have been rising slowly but steadily since the third wave of the virus began in May. In Scotland, 928 patients are in hospital – the highest number since late February. In Wales, patient numbers stand at 428 – the highest since mid-March.

By contrast, Northern Ireland has 472 patients – down slightly from a recent peak of 488. In England, the number is 6,254, up 1% week-on-week but just below the 6,375 recorded on 6 September.

The news came as the health secretary signalled the government was likely to make vaccination mandatory for [NHS](#) staff in order to protect the public.

On a visit to Moorfields eye hospital in London, Sajid Javid said: “It’s right that we do everything we can to protect the most vulnerable from this virus: that is why we have already insisted that those staff that work in care homes get vaccinated and I think people know why that’s so important.

“The reason we have launched this consultation today for the health sector, for the NHS, is because obviously hospitals are full of vulnerable people and I think it’s our duty to make sure that we are considering this.

“We haven’t made a decision but we do want to listen to what people have to say because I think it is important that we show that patient safety will always be a priority.”

Asked whether NHS staff who refused to have the jab risked losing their jobs, Javid said: “I don’t want to prejudge the outcome of the consultation; it’s important this is done properly and we want to listen to what people have got to say. But patient safety will always be a priority.”

Javid said he was “confident” the vaccine booster programme would start later in September.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has said the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines are safe to use as boosters. But the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has yet to give its advice to ministers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/09/more-than-8000-people-in-hospital-with-covid-in-uk>

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[Joe Biden](#)

Biden announces new US vaccine mandates to ‘turn the tide of Covid-19’



Joe Biden announced a vaccine mandate in a speech at the White House, voicing frustration over those who have not yet received their shots.
Photograph: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 20.19 EDT

Joe Biden, striving to restore public confidence in his handling of the pandemic, announced new vaccination mandates on Thursday for 100 million workers, about two-thirds of the American labour force.

Channeling national frustration as the virus surges back, the US president adopted his sternest tone yet in reprimanding the tens of millions of Americans who are still not vaccinated against the coronavirus.

“We can and we will turn the tide of Covid-19,” he said firmly. “It’ll take a lot of hard work and it’s going to take some time. Many of us are frustrated with the nearly 80 million Americans who are still not vaccinated even though the vaccine is safe, effective and free.”

Biden’s speech in the state dining room of the White House, against a backdrop of Abraham Lincoln’s portrait and with watching reporters crammed tightly, was seen as a high-profile attempt to claw back momentum and offer reassurance to Americans feeling despair about whether the pandemic will ever end.

02:35

Biden: 'Patience wearing thin with unvaccinated Americans' – video

The president unveiled a six-pronged strategy, relying on regulatory powers and other steps. He said the Department of Labor was developing an emergency temporary standard that will require all employers with more than 100 employees to ensure their workers are vaccinated or tested weekly.

This will affect more than 80 million workers in private sector businesses. Companies that do not comply could face fines of up to nearly \$14,000 per violation.

Biden said: “The bottom line: we’re going to protect vaccinated workers from unvaccinated co-workers. We’re going to reduce the spread of Covid-19 by increasing the share of the workforce that is vaccinated in businesses all across America.”

The move provoked instant criticism from conservatives sceptical of government overreach. Kevin Stitt, the governor of Oklahoma, said: “It is not the government’s role to dictate to private businesses what to do.”



A New York City restaurant informs customers that they will need to show proof vaccination. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

The administration will also require all workers in healthcare settings that receive Medicaid or Medicare reimbursement be vaccinated, a move that applies to 50,000 providers and covers more than 17 million healthcare workers.

Biden has signed executive orders requiring vaccinations for all federal government workers as well as for employees of contractors that do business with the federal government. The move represents a toughening of measures that Biden [announced in late July](#), requiring federal workers to offer proof of vaccination or submit to regular testing and physical distancing measures in the workplace.

He said: “Today, in total, the vaccine requirements in my plan will affect about 100 million Americans, two-thirds of all workers.”

In another nod to public desire for life to get back to normal, the president called on entertainment venues such as sports arenas and big concert halls to require that patrons be vaccinated or show a negative test for entry.

Biden seemed to be on course to effectively defeat the virus in early July, but has been accused of underestimating the highly contagious Delta variant and the intransigence of millions of unvaccinated Americans.

The fresh wave, combined with America's shambolic withdrawal from Afghanistan, threatens to inflict lasting political damage on Biden and derail his ambitious legislative agenda. His approval rating has dipped below 50% in opinion polls.

Biden gave voice to those who accuse the unvaccinated of holding the nation back and putting public safety at risk. "My message to unvaccinated Americans is this: what more is there to wait for? What more do you need to see? We've made vaccinations free, safe and convenient."

He added: "We've been patient but our patience is wearing thin and your refusal has cost all of us. So please, do the right thing."

He went on the rebuke air travellers who ignore mask rules. "TSA will double the fines on travelers that refuse to mask. If you break the rules be prepared to pay. And by the way, show some respect!"

The second prong of the new plan aims to offer further protection for the more than 175 million people who are already fully vaccinated. This includes preparing to make booster shots available as soon as the Food and Drug Administration and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) grant approval.

Biden also called for governors to require vaccinations for teachers and school staff; currently only nine states have such measures in place.

Mask mandates have become a toxic political issue, with the Republican governors of some states, such as Florida and Texas, seeking to ban them only to face dissent from some school districts and legal challenges. About 45 million children under the age of 12 are not yet eligible for vaccination.



Joe Biden admonished air passengers who fail to wear a mask as he unveiled sweeping new vaccination requirements. Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

Biden said: “Right now, local school officials are trying to keep children safe in a pandemic while their governor picks a fight with them and even threatens their salaries or their jobs. Talk about bullying in schools. If they’ll not help, these governors will not help us beat the pandemic, I will use my powers as president to get them out of the way.”

He promised that the Department of Education would make additional funding available to help local school districts backfill salaries and other funding where it has been withheld by state leaders for implementing safety measures.

The administration will also require vaccinations for teachers and staff at Head Start and Early Head Start programmes, teachers at the Department of Defense, and teachers and staff at Bureau of Indian Education-operated schools. These schools and programmes serve more than 1 million children a year and employ nearly 300,000 staff.

The plan pushes for accelerated production of rapid Covid-19 tests, including at-home tests, seeks to protect the economic recovery by helping

more than 150,000 small businesses and improves care for people with Covid-19 by giving additional help to hospitals currently overwhelmed.

More than 208 million Americans have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, and 177 million are fully vaccinated, but confirmed cases of the virus have soared in recent weeks to an average of about 140,000 per day, with about 1,000 people dying from the virus daily, according to data from the CDC.

Most of the spread and the vast majority of severe illness and death is occurring among those not yet fully vaccinated against the virus, predominantly in areas that voted for Donald Trump in last year's presidential election.

Biden, who ignored shouted questions from reporters, added: "What makes it incredibly more frustrating is we have the tools to combat Covid-19, and a distinct minority of Americans, supported by a distinct minority of elected officials, are preventing us from turning the corner."

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The lesson we failed to learn from 9/11: peace is impossible if we don't talk to our enemies

[Jonathan Powell](#)



A protest in Kabul, 7 September 2021. ‘No one knows if Taliban 2.0 will be a return to the 1990s or something more moderate. They may possibly not even know themselves.’ Photograph: EPA

Fri 10 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

The fall of Kabul 20 years after 9/11 represents not just the failure of the western strategy in [Afghanistan](#) but a wider failure of our overall strategy in tackling the terrorism that gave rise to the attacks in New York and Washington.

There was no real alternative to going after the leadership of al-Qaida after the [attacks that cost nearly 3,000 lives](#); and once the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, there was no real alternative to taking on the Taliban themselves. That is why the invasion in support of the Northern Alliance enjoyed widespread support at the time around the world.

The eventual failure is not really the result of “forever wars”, nor trying to “remake nations”, as some suggest. If we don’t have the patience to sustain wars, then we shouldn’t embark on them in the first place. And if we don’t help countries rebuild institutions after participating in a war, then we end up with a spectacular mess like Libya. The challenge is doing these things properly.

The principal failure in Afghanistan was, rather, to fail to learn, from our previous struggles with terrorism, that you only get to a lasting peace when you have an inclusive negotiation – not when you try to impose a settlement by force. In Northern Ireland we tried making peace at Sunningdale in 1973, in the Anglo-Irish agreement in 1985, and in the Downing Street Declaration in 1993 – each time excluding Sinn Féin, and each time we failed to end the Troubles. Having tried everything else, we finally had to talk to the men with guns, and that is why the Good Friday agreement succeeded.

In Afghanistan we repeated the earlier errors in Northern Ireland. The first missed opportunity was 2002-04. I am as much to blame as anyone else, since I was in government at the time. After the [Taliban](#) collapsed, they sued for peace. Instead of engaging them in an inclusive process and giving them a stake in the new Afghanistan, the Americans continued to pursue them, and they returned to fighting.

After I left Downing Street, I argued in the Guardian for [talking to the Taliban](#) but was contradicted by those still in government, who said it was OK to talk to the IRA and the PLO but not the insurgents in Afghanistan. There were repeated concrete opportunities to start negotiations with the Taliban from then on – at a time when they were much weaker than today and open to a settlement – but political leaders were too squeamish to be seen publicly dealing with a terrorist group.

When the US did start negotiating with the Taliban in 2014 it was to secure the release of Bowe Bergdahl, a kidnapped US soldier. And when official political negotiations finally started in 2018 they were bilateral; failed to include the Afghan government; focused primarily on Taliban undertakings not to host al-Qaida rather than an inclusive internal settlement; and President Trump constantly undercut his negotiators by signalling his intention to leave unilaterally.

Even this year, inclusive negotiations could have succeeded under President Biden, but not after it became clear that US forces were going to leave regardless of any conditions being agreed. All the Taliban had to do was wait.

Now the [Taliban have won](#). They were as surprised as the rest of us to retake Afghanistan so quickly and so completely – and like the proverbial dog chasing the car, now they have caught it they don't appear to know what to do with it. They have just announced a new cabinet, but face governing a country that doesn't support them, dealing with a looming humanitarian crisis without funds, demobilising a generation of fighters untrained for any other job, containing the new insurgents of Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), and managing their own squabbles about how much power to share.

They are in danger of making the same mistake we did in 2001 and thinking the winner takes it all. But the country desperately needs international assistance, and at least some of the Taliban leaders know it.

Of course, engagement with groups such as the Taliban is not without moral and political hazard. No one knows if Taliban 2.0 will be a return to the 1990s or something more moderate. They may possibly not even know themselves. But we have a moral debt to the people of Afghanistan, and the only way the international community can help them is to use any leverage we have left with the Taliban to push for an inclusive process in Afghanistan. This should include the protection of the rights of minorities and women, and the establishment of a representative and accountable government.

It will require an international consensus on the steps the Taliban have to take, and a monitoring mechanism to make sure they actually do so. It is in

our self-interest to do this: because if Afghanistan does collapse into civil war again, we in Europe will feel the impact in terms of refugees, drugs and terrorism on our streets.

Even more importantly, we have to learn the lessons from Afghanistan elsewhere in the world. How are we going to deal with the armed Islamist groups across northern Africa, in Somalia (another “forever war”), in Mozambique and in Nigeria? Are we going to continue kidding ourselves that we can defeat them by military means alone?

Are we going to continue to refuse to talk to Hamas, and to the other Islamist groups? The lesson from Afghanistan is as clear as it was from Northern Ireland. If we ever want to secure lasting peace then we have to engage with our enemies, not just with those we like.

The first critical step would be for western governments to make it easier to talk to proscribed groups such as the Taliban, and be politically brave enough to do so before it is too late. The UK’s growing raft of counter-terrorism laws were intended to choke off support for extremist ideologies. Instead, the net result has been to criminalise efforts towards diplomacy and political solutions, whether by governments or NGOs. We’re left trying to resolve armed conflicts with one hand tied behind our backs.

In the end we could not defeat the Taliban on the battlefield, nor build a stable new state that shut them out. Our “never negotiate” mantra – eventually replaced by trying to negotiate a hasty exit – undermined the efforts made by our armed forces on the battlefield.

We have to rethink our strategy unless we want to spend the next 20 years making the same mistakes over and over again. Wars don’t end for good until you talk to the men with the guns.

Jonathan Powell is chief executive of [Inter Mediate](#), an NGO working on armed conflicts around the world. He was prime minister Tony Blair’s chief of staff, and chief British negotiator on Northern Ireland, between 1995 and 2007

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[Opinion](#)[Theranos](#)

The trial of Elizabeth Holmes: perfect for the age of the Instagram influencer

[Emma Brockes](#)



‘Is her black turtleneck the uniform of a genius or a Steve Jobs Halloween costume?’ Elizabeth Holmes in 2016. Photograph: Jeff Chiu/AP

Fri 10 Sep 2021 04.04 EDT

The end point of unbridled self-belief went on trial in San Jose in California this week, as Elizabeth Holmes – founder of defunct health tech company [Theranos](#), and former world’s “youngest self-made billionaire” – appeared in court accused of fraud.

After dropping out of Stanford at the age of 19, Holmes built a company that was valued, at its height, at \$9bn (£6.5bn), and appeared on the cover of every news magazine in the land. On Wednesday, she sat with her legal team as an assistant US attorney accused her of being [a liar and a cheat](#). It was a thrilling end to the kind of American drama that makes the non-billionaires among us feel good.

The schadenfreude, familiar from other recent executive flameouts – most spectacularly, [Billy McFarland](#)’s catastrophic Fyre festival in 2017 – is rooted in a general exhaustion with the mechanics of self-promotion.

The point at which self-belief shades into self-deception and then active fraud is only detectable when the perpetrator is skilled enough to recruit others to their reality. In the case of the average Instagram influencer, it is tempting to think of these exaggerations and distortions not only as victimless crimes, but as the packaged delusions that make up the product itself. (I’m envisaging Caroline Calloway, the 29-year-old lifestyle guru exposed two years ago for selling – [and then refunding](#) – underwhelming “creativity workshops” for \$165 a pop, to a crowd it was hard to drum up much sympathy for.)

In the case of Holmes, the scale of the alleged deception, if proven, will have been of a different order altogether, with the potentially serious consequences that come from faking medical technology. And yet what remains striking about Holmes and the case against Theranos is how, in broad outline, it is indistinguishable from any fake-it-till-you-make-it Silicon Valley startup.

Robert Leach, assistant US attorney, set out the case against Holmes in language familiar to viewers of Dragons' Den (or its US equivalent, Shark Tank), accusing her of puffing up her company with standard-sounding PR guff. Holmes had, said Leach, exaggerated her revenue projections and used the media to make unprovable claims about her product – like so many other companies chasing investment.

She had also, he said, knowingly promoted the company's blood-analysing technology as revolutionary, when in reality it did nothing that standard blood-testing tech couldn't do. If convicted, Holmes could land in jail for up to 20 years for, as her defence attorneys are framing it, the crime of doing what every other dreamer in Palo Alto is doing: simply "trying your hardest".

Corporate deceit, when uncovered, is often a lot less sophisticated than the product it's promoting, raising the question of why so many people so readily fall for it. In the case of Theranos, the prosecution alleges that, early on in the company's development, it produced a recommendation from Pfizer, in which the drug giant praised the blood-analysing tech for its "superior performance". The problem, said prosecution attorneys, is that Pfizer wrote no such thing; it merely appeared on Pfizer-headed notepaper, an astonishingly entry-level scam, if true.

And yet otherwise smart people were allegedly taken in by Holmes, including Henry Kissinger, and former US secretary of state George Shultz, both of whom agreed to sit on the Theranos board. There is a nobility in overreach: it is the typifying American gesture, and the grandness of Holmes' claims had a seemingly irresistible pull. There's also a gender aspect here. Part of the narrative around Holmes's success is that, by using her swishy blond hair and big eyes, she conned otherwise sensible elderly men into lending her their credibility. Being a woman has not, historically, worked out well for aspiring CEOs, but Holmes broke the mould here too.

The defence team's approach appears to be to dump a lot of the blame for Theranos's failure on Holmes's business partner, [Ramesh Balwani](#), with whom she was in a relationship at the time. She was naive, say her lawyers. Her company failed, and failure is not a crime. "The villain the government just presented is actually a living, breathing human being who did her very

best each and every day,” said her lawyer, Lance Wade – an oddly infantilising bid for sympathy that seemed gendered too.

At this stage, recasting Holmes as a wronged woman will be an uphill struggle. As we know from other fallen stars, once there’s blood in the water, that which once looked impressive appears ludicrous and cheap. From Holmes’s wardrobe – overnight, the black turtleneck went from uniform-of-a-genius to Steve Jobs Halloween costume – to the garbled poetry she texted to Balwani while the pair were still seeing each other, cited in court papers and inviting a short stab of sympathy for the woman in the dock (“You are breeze in desert for me / My water / And ocean / Meant to be only together tiger”).

Holmes has elected to take the stand, a risky move and one that nods towards some lingering vestige of what landed her here in the first place. At the height of Theranos’s fortunes, one got the sense about Holmes that no one found her as impressive as she found herself. The root of so much success – and crashing delusion.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
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[Climate crimes](#)[Environment](#)

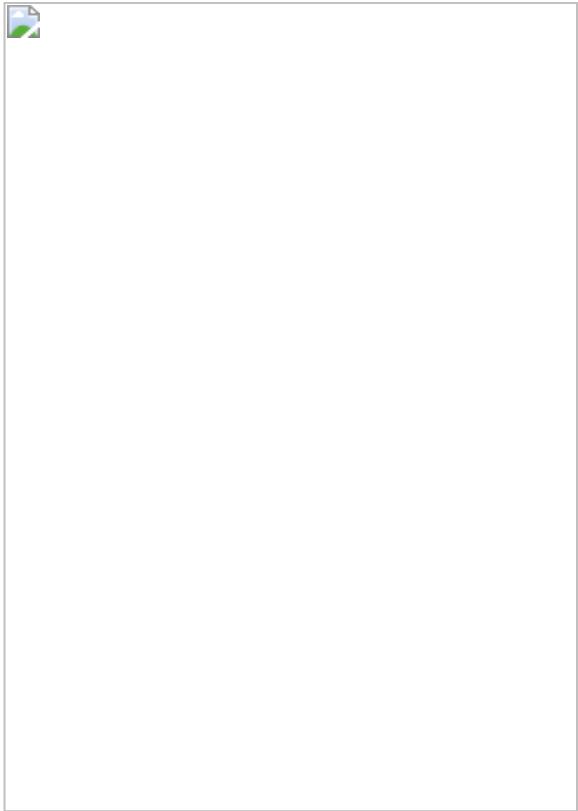
Forget plans to lower emissions by 2050 – this is deadly procrastination

[Peter Kalmus](#)



‘It’s time to grow up and let go of the fantasy that we can get out of this without big changes that affect our lives.’ Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

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Fri 10 Sep 2021 05.45 EDT

The world has by and large adopted “net zero by 2050” as its de facto climate goal, but two fatal flaws hide in plain sight within those 16 characters. One is “net zero.” The other is “by 2050”.

These two flaws provide cover for big oil and politicians who wish to preserve the status quo. Together they comprise a deadly prescription for inaction and catastrophically high levels of irreversible climate and ecological breakdown.

First, consider “by 2050”. This deadline feels comfortably far away, encouraging further climate procrastination. Who feels urgency over a deadline in 2050? This is convenient for the world’s elected leaders, who typically have term limits of between three and five years, less so for anyone who needs a livable planet.

Pathways for achieving net zero by 2050 – meaning that in 2050 any carbon emissions would be balanced by CO₂ withdrawn through natural means, like forests, and through hypothetical carbon-trapping technology – are designed to [give roughly even odds for keeping global heating below 1.5C](#). But it’s now apparent that even the [current 1.1C of global heating](#) is not a “safe” level. Climate catastrophes are arriving with a frequency and ferocity that have [shocked climate scientists](#). The fact that climate models failed to predict the intensity of the summer’s heatwaves and flooding suggests that severe impacts will come sooner than previously thought. Madagascar is on the brink of [the first climate famine](#), and developments such as multi-regional crop losses and climate warfare even before reaching 1.5C should no longer be ruled out.

Meanwhile, “net zero” is a phrase that represents magical thinking rooted in our society’s technology fetish. Just presuppose enough hypothetical carbon capture and you can pencil out a plan for meeting any climate goal, even while allowing the fossil fuel industry to keep growing. While there may be useful negative-emissions strategies such as reforestation and conservation agriculture, [their carbon capture potential is small](#) compared with cumulative fossil fuel carbon emissions, and their effects may not be permanent. Policymakers are betting the future of life on Earth that someone will invent some kind of whiz-bang tech to draw down CO₂ at a massive scale.

The world’s largest direct air capture facility [opened this month](#) in Iceland; if it works, it will capture one ten-millionth of humanity’s current emissions, and due to its expense it is not yet scalable. It is the deepest of moral failures to casually saddle today’s young people with a critical task that may prove unfeasible by orders of magnitude – and expecting them to somehow accomplish this amid worsening heatwaves, fires, storms and floods that will pummel financial, insurance, infrastructure, water, food, health and political systems.

It should tell us all we need to know about “net zero by 2050” that it is [supported by fossil fuel executives](#), and that climate uber-villain Rupert Murdoch has [embraced it](#) through his News Corp Australia mouthpiece.

So where does this leave us? Stabilizing the rapidly escalating destruction of the Earth will require directly scaling back and ultimately ending fossil fuels. To lower the odds of civilizational collapse, society must shift into emergency mode.

It will be easy to tell when society has begun this shift: leaders will begin to take actions that actually inflict pain on big oil, such as ending fossil fuel subsidies and placing a moratorium on all new oil and gas infrastructure.

Then rapid emissions descent could begin. I believe the global zero-emissions goal should be set no later than 2035; high-emitting nations have a moral obligation to go faster, and to provide transition assistance to low-emitting nations. Crucially, any zero goal must be paired with a commitment to annual reductions leading steadily to this goal year by year, and binding plans across all levels of government to achieve those annual targets. If this sounds extreme, bear in mind that climate breakdown has still only barely begun and that the damage will be irreversible.

Negative emissions strategies must also be left out of climate planning – in other words, forget the “net” in “net zero”. Otherwise they will [continue to provide the distraction and delay](#) sought by the fossil fuel industry. It would be beyond foolish to gamble our planet on technologies that may never exist at scale.

Due to the decades of inaction [dishonestly engineered by fossil fuel executives](#), the speed and scale now required is staggering. There is no longer any incremental way out. It’s time to grow up and let go of the fantasy that we can get out of this without big changes that affect our lives. Policy steps that seem radical today – for example, proposals to nationalize the fossil fuel industry and ration oil and gas supplies – will seem less radical with each new climate disaster. Climate emergency mode will require personal sacrifice, especially from the high-emitting rich. But civilizational collapse would be unimaginably worse.

As a climate scientist, I am terrified by what I see coming. I want world leaders to stop hiding behind magical thinking and feel the same terror. Then they would finally end fossil fuels.

This story is published as part of [Covering Climate Now](#), a global collaboration of news outlets strengthening coverage of the climate story.

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[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

Boris Johnson's care victory shows he can get away with sham policies – for now

[Polly Toynbee](#)





‘Boris Johnson’s policy flies in a miasma of aspirational promises, while facts are what he says they are.’ Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Thu 9 Sep 2021 12.48 EDT

He does it again, he pulls it off. The figure David Cameron once called the “[greased piglet](#)” has slipped from the grasp of his angry party and the Tory press, all incensed by this new levy. Boris Johnson trounced them, a mere five rebels. Despite featuring only 21st in popularity in [ConservativeHome’s](#) poll of party members, he defies them all.

As long as enough of the people can be fooled enough of the time, he will go on getting away with downright fraudulent policies. Breaking promises is a peccadillo compared with a social care policy that is a sham from top to toe. But, for now, his policy flies in a miasma of aspirational promises, while facts are [what he says](#) they are.

Brexit taught [Boris Johnson](#) this important lesson: much political capital can be mined from a hallucinatory politics of make-believe and comforting words. Cloudy visions of sovereignty, independence, taking back control, two fingers to France and Britannia ruling the waves still robustly surf over brutal encounters with hard Brexit truths.

This week's disgusting [revelation](#) is that water companies running short of vital chemicals – due to a shortage of lorry drivers, itself owing to Brexit and the pandemic – will be allowed to discharge semi-treated sewage into England's already polluted rivers and seas. That follows stories of empty shelves in food shops and Ikea, depleted menus in [Nando's](#) and McDonald's, and the threat to Christmas produce. Brexit has caused a critical lack of EU carers and food processors, while fishing is stricken.

The prime minister hopes his “clear plan” for “fixing the crisis in social care once and for all” will join Brexit up in that political ether where breezy feelgood words shield enough ears from everyday facts. Virtually no extra money is going into care, no more than the usual annual bungs it gets to stop it collapsing altogether, the Resolution Foundation's Torsten Bell tells me.

No, it will not prevent most homeowners from being forced to sell up if they need expensive years of care. It will provide virtually no extra money to raise standards: quite the opposite, as it will stop self-payers – who can no longer be charged higher rates than council residents – from cross-subsidising the less well-off, causing some care homes to close. About half of local authority spending on care goes on [younger disabled people](#), and there's nothing in these plans for them. There will be no new money for [professionalising and paying care staff](#), with 170,000 [vacancies](#) expected by the end of the year. It doesn't come close to replacing the nearly £8bn cut to council care budgets during the austerity decade.

Waiting for funding to be handed over from the NHS is a never event, and any money is assigned first to relieving the costs to the better off. The value of the cap in costs risks unravelling when it starts to pay out from 2023: care recipients may be shocked to find they are still paying substantial sums. Even the Adam Smith Institute has [hammered](#) the injustice of a plan where young workers pay more to save homeowners' inheritances.

Rachel Reeves' [barnstorming speech](#) asked the two key questions: Does it fix the problem? And is it done fairly? No and no. No burden falls, she said, on “financial assets, stocks and shares, sales of property, pension income, annuity income, interest income, property rental income, inheritance income”, adding, “fancy that”. Well yes, many voters do fancy raising greatly more from the richest. That should be Labour's policy and if it's

about to be, it should have been out there in a plan this week, a plan needed urgently from now on.

For ahead is more austerity, a lot of it, with deeper cuts to all but health and defence. Schools in England will be 1% worse off than they were a decade ago, factoring in inflation and rising costs. Spending plans announced by the chancellor show all the rest losing between 12% and 25%, according to Bell (his Resolution Foundation will report shortly). That's cuts for councils and all they provide, from parks to potholes, libraries and leisure centres, while they are overwhelmed by rising care needs. There will be nothing making up for cuts in further education or skills and training. The green homes schemes failure was excoriated by the National Audit Office this week. Wherever you look, whatever your particular concerns, there will be less, and still less than in 2010.

The hard Johnson calculus is that individually, each is a minority issue. Even social care or nurseries affect few families at any one time, so exaggerating tiny announcements for money for this or that will do the trick – or that's his gamble. It's for Labour to burst those falsehoods one by one, binding together these cuts into a big picture of public service dereliction and delinquency. No, this isn't an end to small state, low-tax Conservatism. Any government would have been forced to spend massively on relief during the pandemic – and he spent far less than France, Germany or the US. As Sajid Javid helpfully pointed out, we remain a low-tax country compared to European equivalents and British businesses benefit from among the lowest corporation taxes in the western world.

I doubt Johnson can keep his bubble machine blowing out the myth that austerity is over. Whether it's soaring food bank use from universal credit cuts or the NHS struggling with waiting times, sooner rather than later, enough voters will see through his make-believe politics.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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Belarus

Putin and Lukashenko move to integrate economies of Russia and Belarus



Russian president Vladimir Putin (right) and Belarus's president Alexander Lukashenko meet at the Kremlin in Moscow on Thursday. Photograph: Mikhail Voskresenskiy/Sputnik/AFP/Getty

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Thu 9 Sep 2021 13.05 EDT

Vladimir Putin and Belarusian leader [Alexander Lukashenko](#) said they had made progress toward integrating the two countries' economies during a summit on Thursday evening in advance of massive joint military exercises.

Speaking late on Thursday, Putin said the two leaders had agreed to coordinate the countries' macroeconomic policies, institute common tax and customs measures, and harmonise other financial controls as part of a 28-

point roadmap that is expected to increase Russia's influence over its neighbour.

The countries will move to integrate their energy markets while maintaining steeply discounted supplies of natural gas to [Belarus](#), and Russia will provide a further \$630m in loans to the cash-strapped Belarusian government, Putin said.

The texts of the agreements were not made available and the leaders did not sign any documents publicly. While the two sides announced new economic agreements, they stopped short of introducing a common currency or going into detail on any defence or political agreements, signalling a limit to the extent of the negotiations.

Lukashenko, who has been sanctioned by the west for a brutal crackdown on the country's opposition, has been seen as resisting pressure from Moscow to concede control over government policy in exchange for Russian support.

"First the economic foundation must be laid before moving further on the political track," Putin said after the talks, noting that the two sides had not discussed possible political integration.

While the two sides did not openly discuss arms sales or new Russian bases in Belarus, there were signs of growing military cooperation between the countries.

Ahead of his sixth meeting with Putin this year, Lukashenko said he hoped to buy a large shipment of weapons, including combat jets and helicopters, as well as the advanced S-400 air defence weapons. [Belarus](#) also claimed that Moscow had moved Su-30 fighters to Belarus in order to patrol the country's borders with Europe.

The Kremlin was thought to be leveraging that isolation to pressure Lukashenko into finalising a number of integration projects that would draw Belarus far closer to Russia politically, militarily and economically, even binding the countries with a shared currency.

Yet Lukashenko had stalled on implementing the agreements, which were drawn up as part of a 1999 Union State treaty, recognising that they would undermine his position and hand Belarusian sovereignty over to Moscow. A Belarusian ambassador had said that the two sides may sign the agreements on Thursday evening, state media reported. But similar predictions have fallen flat before.

The meeting comes just days before the start of the Zapad-2021 military exercises, in which an estimated tens of thousands of Belarusian and Russian troops will participate in planned manoeuvres on Europe's borders. Moscow has claimed that as many as 200,000 troops were taking part in the training, but that number was believed to be inflated.

The exercises, which are held every four years, usually simulate a conflict between Nato and a Russian-led alliance. The 2017 drills were met with considerable alarm in the west, where there were concerns that the exercises could serve to justify a military buildup on Nato's borders. The response to the 2021 drills, which were set to be held from 10-16 September, has been more muted, although European countries along the Belarusian border have heightened security precautions, in part due to a migrant crisis fomented by the Belarusian leader.

“I asked you to come to summarise the results of what’s been done recently in creating the programme of the Union State,” Putin said as the talks opened on Thursday, referring to a decision to further integrate the countries that had stalled since it was first agreed in principle in 1999.

“We are moving forward like civilised countries, only together, only as a union … nearly a single people,” said Lukashenko in a rhetorical flourish.

Iran nuclear deal

West to decide on Iran censure after damning UN nuclear watchdog report



The Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi, warned any censure motion could delay Iran returning to the talks over compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal.
Photograph: Wana News Agency/Reuters

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor

Fri 10 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

European powers and the US will decide on Friday whether to censure Iran in response to a damning report by the UN nuclear inspectorate the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) showing that the new hardline government in Tehran had made it impossible for inspectors to oversee the country's nuclear programme.

The Iranian president, [Ebrahim Raisi](#), has warned any such censure motion, or a reference to the UN security council, could delay or prevent Iran

returning to the talks in Vienna on how the US and Iran could come back into compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal.

Mutual compliance would result in the lifting of a swathe of sanctions on [Iran](#) and the likely release of political prisoners.

The US special envoy on Iran, Rob Malley, will meet diplomats from France, Germany and the UK in Paris ahead of a board meeting of the IAEA, the UN's nuclear watchdog, on Monday.

Russia urged the Europeans not to complicate the Iranian return by tabling a censure motion but also urged Iran as soon as possible to return to the talks that started in April and ended in June. Malley met Russian diplomats on Thursday in Moscow in the hope [Russia](#) could spell out to Tehran the risks it is running if it overplays its negotiating hand.

Earlier this week Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, said “we are getting closer to the point at which a strict compliance with the JCPOA (the nuclear deal) does not reproduce the benefits the agreement achieved”. But he added “we are not there yet”.

It is becoming hard for the west not to table some censure given the clear public warning by Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, on Tuesday that the IAEA’s activities in Iran had been severely undermined.

“I am increasingly concerned that issues with unannounced sites remain unresolved and that Iran needs to resolve them as soon as possible,” Grossi said in a statement earlier this week.

He has submitted two reports setting out what Iran’s non-cooperation means in practice. Grossi has asked to fly to Tehran for talks, but his request was described in Tehran as suspended. Grossi is not seen as someone who wants to confront Iran, and has previously shown ingenuity in seeking compromises that keep the inspection process alive.

The Iranian parliament withdrew from a cooperation agreement with the IAEA. However, after talks with Grossi in February, the foreign ministry

agreed to keep IAEA security cameras running inside its nuclear sites, without providing a commitment that the tapes would be handed over. This informal agreement carried on until 24 June, but has not been formally continued after that date.

But in addition to Iran's refusal to clarify officially if the February 2021 special monitoring arrangement was still in place, Tehran has not responded to requests by the IAEA to access remote surveillance equipment.

Kelsey Davenport, the director for nonproliferation policy at the Arms Control Association, said: "The IAEA report says the equipment needs to be serviced and data storage replaced every three months – that date passed around 24 August, increasing the risk of lapses in data collection that could impede the IAEA's ability to reconstruct a record of Iran's nuclear activities."

The 7 September IAEA report noted that "Iran's failure to respond to the agency's requests for access to its monitoring equipment is seriously compromising the agency's technical capability to maintain continuity of knowledge". The continuity of knowledge was "necessary for the agency to resume its verification and monitoring of Iran's nuclear-related commitments in the future", it said.

Amir Abdollahian, the new Iranian foreign minister, replacing the long-serving Javad Zarif, suggested it may take two to three months to agree the terms of Iran's return to Vienna, a timeline that has exasperated Europeans given the progress that had been made with the previous government.

Davenport warned: "Raisi's rhetoric and the current trajectory of the nuclear programme suggest he may try to drive a harder bargain to extract more sanctions relief and, in the process, overplay his hand or drag out talks past the point where the US thinks it's worth continuing."

The IAEA also estimated that Iran's 20% enriched uranium reserves had reached 84.3kg, up from 62.3kg three months ago.

In a phone call with the European Council president, Charles Michel, on Wednesday, Raisi said: "Any unconstructive move in the IAEA would also

disrupt the [Vienna] negotiation process.”

Much of the call seemed to have been taken up with Raisi urging Michel and the EU to show greater independence from the US after the Afghanistan pull-out. Raisi may be misreading the European mood if he thinks European anger over US handling of Afghanistan will spill over into a similar breach on Iran.

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[Amazon](#)

Amazon offers to pay college fees of 750,000 frontline US workers



An Amazon worker in Miami, Florida. According to the US Department of Labor, job vacancies hit a record high of 10.9m in July. Photograph: Cristobal Herrera-Ulashkevich/EPA

[Mark Sweney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Fri 10 Sep 2021 04.58 EDT

Amazon has offered to pay the cost of college tuition fees for 750,000 of its frontline workers, the latest move by a major US company to offer perks to attract and retain staff amid a labour shortage.

The company, which is investing \$1.2bn (£0.86bn) in the scheme by 2025, said it would cover the cost of college tuition fees and textbooks for US

hourly staff after 90 days of employment for as long as they remain at Amazon.

It will also begin covering the cost of other types of education, including high school diplomas and English-language courses, as well as extending on-the-job career training to 300,000 people.

“Amazon is now the largest job creator in the US,” said Dave Clark, the chief executive of worldwide consumer at Amazon, in a blogpost. “We know that investing in free skills training for our teams can have a huge impact for hundreds of thousands of families across the country.”

Amazon is the latest big US firm to offer education-focused perks to workers after similar moves by Walmart, Target and Kroger. Last month, Walmart said it would pay the costs of tuition and books for its hourly staff, with about 1.5 million workers eligible. Target has said it will offer free undergraduate degrees to more than 340,000 staff in the US.

According to the US Department of Labor, job vacancies hit a record high of 10.9m in July, exceeding the number of unemployed people by more than 2m.

Earlier this month, a branch of McDonald’s in the US urged 14- and 15-year-olds to apply for jobs to plug a shortage of fast food chain workers.

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In May, Amazon said it would hire 750,000 workers across its warehouse and delivery network in the US and Canada. The company hired about 500,000 staff last year.

“Today, there are not enough workers to fill every job in the United States, which means businesses are struggling to hire, especially for roles that require specific or technical skill sets,” said Cheryl Oldham, a senior vice-president at the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

“When large employers like Amazon commit to investing in their people through upskilling programmes, it helps to ensure that the business community has access to a workforce pipeline that meets their needs today and in the future.”

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[Afghanistan](#)

Violent attacks on Afghan journalists by Taliban prompt growing alarm

00:56

Afghan journalists describe violent Taliban beatings when reporting on protests – video

[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) in Kandahar, and [Peter Beaumont](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 12.44 EDT

A spate of violent attacks on Afghan journalists by the [Taliban](#) is prompting growing alarm over the freedom of the country's media, with one senior journalist declaring that "press freedom has ended".

As images and testimony circulated internationally of the arrest and brutal flogging of two reporters who were detained covering a women's rights demonstration in Kabul on Wednesday, Human Rights Watch and the Committee to Protect Journalists raised concern over the recent string of attacks.

In just two days this week, the Taliban detained and later released at least 14 journalists covering protests in Kabul, with at least six of these journalists subject to violence during their arrests or detention, the CPJ reported.

Other journalists, including some working with the BBC, were also prevented from filming the protest on Wednesday.

The Taliban authorities also briefly detained a [Tolonews](#) photojournalist, Wahid Ahmadi, on Tuesday, confiscating his camera and preventing other journalists from filming the protest he was covering.

The renewed threats against the media have coincided with the announcement by the new Taliban interior ministry that it was [banning unauthorised protests](#).

“The Taliban is quickly proving that earlier promises to allow Afghanistan’s independent media to continue operating freely and safely are worthless,” said Steven Butler, CPJ’s Asia programme coordinator.

“We urge the Taliban to live up to those earlier promises, to stop beating and detaining reporters doing their job, and allow the media to work freely without fear of reprisal.”

The comments were also echoed by [Patricia Gossman](#), the associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

“Taliban authorities [claimed](#) that they would allow the media to function so long as they ‘respected Islamic values,’ but they are increasingly preventing journalists from reporting on demonstrations. The Taliban need to ensure that all journalists are able to carry out their work without abusive restrictions or fear of retribution,” she said.

One senior Afghan journalist – who spoke to the Guardian on condition of anonymity – said that despite assurances by senior figures in the Taliban that the media could operate freely, the reality on the ground was that journalists were facing mounting threats from local Taliban members.

“There’s a big difference between the Taliban in the media and the Taliban on the street,” the journalist said.

“These Taliban on the street are local people, they don’t have understanding and they are very strict. What the senior people are saying is not acceptable to the local Taliban. They were in fight and they have no education.

“The Taliban who are on the ground have beaten journalists in Kabul and some other places. I have many years of experience in journalism and I believe that the freedoms of journalism have ended in Afghanistan ... People can’t criticise the Taliban in the media.”

The comments came as 200 Americans and other foreigners flew out of Kabul on Thursday after the [new Taliban government](#) agreed to their evacuation flight, the first since the ending of the US led airlifted concluded.

The departures are the first international flights to take off from Kabul airport since the end of the chaotic US-led evacuation of 124,000 foreigners and at-risk Afghans.

Evidence of increasing assault on the media was dramatised by the beating of two reporters from Etilaat Roz (Information Daily) who were detained covering a women's rights protest in Kabul.

Pictures of the two men's injuries, including large weals and bruises across their backs, were shared widely on social media.

According to one of the two, Nematullah Naqdi, a photographer, the pair were taken to a police station in the capital, where they say they were punched and beaten with batons, electrical cables and whips after being accused of organising the protest.

"One of the Taliban put his foot on my head, crushed my face against the concrete. They kicked me in the head ... I thought they were going to kill me," said Naqdi.

Naqdi said he and his colleague Taqi Daryabi, a reporter, had been accosted by a Taliban fighter as soon as he started taking pictures at the protest.

"They told me: 'You cannot film,'" he said. "They arrested all those who were filming and took their phones."

"The Taliban started insulting me, kicking me," said Naqdi, adding that he was accused of being the organiser of the rally. He asked why he was being beaten, only to be told: "You are lucky you weren't beheaded."

The spate of assaults followed [the Taliban's announcement of a new government](#) on Tuesday, which was widely seen as a signal they were not looking to broaden their base and present a more tolerant face to the world, as they had suggested they would do before their military takeover.

Foreign countries greeted the interim government with caution and dismay on Wednesday. In Kabul, dozens of women took to the streets in protest.

Many critics called on the leadership to respect basic human rights and revive the economy, which faces collapse amid steep inflation, food shortages and the prospect of foreign aid being slashed as countries seek to isolate the Taliban.

The White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said no one in the Biden administration “would suggest that the Taliban are respected and valued members of the global community”.

Longer-term aid would depend on the Taliban upholding basic freedoms, she added.

The new acting cabinet includes former detainees of the US military prison at Guantánamo Bay, while the interior minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani, is wanted by the US on terrorism charges and carries a reward of \$10mn (£7.25m).

His uncle, with a bounty of \$5m, is the minister for refugees and repatriation.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/09/violent-attacks-on-afghan-journalists-by-taliban-prompt-growing-alarm>

[Texas](#)

Biden administration sues Texas over ‘clearly unconstitutional’ abortion ban

02:42

Biden administration sues Texas for 'unconstitutional' abortion law – video

*[Adam Gabbatt](#)
[@adamgabbatt](#)*

Thu 9 Sep 2021 18.01 EDT

The Biden administration sued Texas on Thursday over the state's [extreme abortion law](#), which amounts to a near total ban on abortion, calling the law "clearly unconstitutional".

The US attorney general, Merrick Garland, said the law that went into effect last week after the supreme court refused to block it and bans almost all abortions in the state was one "all Americans should fear".

Senate bill 8, pushed through by Texas's Republican-dominated legislature, bans abortion once embryonic cardiac activity is detected, which is around six weeks. Most women are not aware they are pregnant as early as that time.

The justice department decided to argue that the law, which offers no exceptions for rape or incest, "illegally interferes with federal interests", the Wall Street Journal first [reported](#).

Later on Thursday, Vice-President Kamala Harris said the right of women to make their own choices on reproductive rights and decisions about "their own bodies" was "not negotiable".

She added that Joe Biden's and her support for the supreme court's landmark [Roe v Wade decision](#) from 1973, which paved the way for abortion to be

legal across the US, was “unequivocal”.

VP Kamala Harris voiced her support to abortion and reproductive health providers during a meeting Thursday to discuss the Texas abortion bill.

“The right of women to make decisions about their own bodies is not negotiable,” she said pic.twitter.com/iRtofLrmRW

— Bloomberg Quicktake (@Quicktake) [September 9, 2021](#)

On Monday Garland [said](#) the justice department would “protect those seeking to obtain or provide reproductive health services”, under a federal law known as the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances.

Garland said that law would be enforced “in order to protect the constitutional rights of women and other persons, including access to an abortion”.

The Texas law [incentivizes any private citizen](#) to sue an abortion provider or anyone deemed to have helped a woman get an abortion contravening the law. It came into effect on 1 September, and survived an emergency appeal to the supreme court, which voted 5-4 to allow the law to remain in force.

On Thursday, when announcing the lawsuit, Garland said: “The act is clearly unconstitutional” and said that it failed to give women seeking an abortion their constitutional right “at the very moment they need it”.

And he added that the “kind of scheme” that Texas has devised and other states want to follow, where the public enforces the law as a way to avoid legal challenge, and allows individuals to sue abortion providers or those helping a woman obtain the service, was designed to “nullify the constitution”.

Joe Biden condemned the new law and reaffirmed the White House’s support for abortion rights. “This extreme [Texas](#) law blatantly violates the constitutional right established under Roe v Wade and upheld as a precedent for nearly half a century,” Biden said in a statement.

The Biden administration has since been under pressure to act, with Democrats on the House judiciary committee [writing to Garland](#) on Tuesday, although many experts believe that winning the lawsuit will be a challenge for the federal government.

“The Department of Justice cannot permit private individuals seeking to deprive women of the constitutional right to choose an abortion to escape scrutiny under existing federal law simply because they attempt to do so under the color of state law,” wrote the Democratic members of Congress, who include Pramila Jayapal, representative for Washington, and Val Demings, from Florida.

The Texas law is the strictest legislation enacted against abortion rights in the United States since the supreme court’s landmark Roe v Wade decision in 1973. At least 12 other states have enacted bans early in pregnancy, but all have been blocked from going into effect.

Abortion providers have said the law will probably force many abortion clinics in Texas to ultimately close. Women’s rights advocates [fear](#) the conservative-dominated supreme court’s lack of action over the law could signal the start of the unravelling of Roe v Wade.

Harris said on Thursday that no legislative body had the right to circumvent the US constitution.

Harris, who was speaking to reporters at a meeting with abortion providers and patients, said the right of women to make decisions about their own bodies was “not negotiable”.

Reuters contributed reporting

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[**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**](#)

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Boris Johnson defends breaking manifesto pledge as he sets out tax rise for NHS and social care – as it happened

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Social care

Nadhim Zahawi ‘not comfortable’ with breaking manifesto promises



Nadhim Zahawi also conceded that the NHS backlog would ‘increase before it gets better’. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Tue 7 Sep 2021 03.24 EDT

A UK government minister has said he is “not comfortable with breaking any manifesto promises” as the prime minister prepares to announce an increase in national insurance contributions to fund health and social care and limit a rise in the state pension.

Nadhim Zahawi, the vaccine deployment minister, was defending plans to fund an overhaul of social care and tackle the NHS backlog, which have

attracted criticism from Conservative frontbenchers, former chancellors and the party's so-called "red wall" MPs.

It is widely expected Boris Johnson will later on Tuesday reveal plans to break two manifesto commitments: an increase of national insurance by 1.25% and to break the pensions triple lock – a pledge to increase the state pension each year in line with the rising cost of living, increasing average wages, or 2.5%, whichever is highest.

Johnson is facing a mounting rebellion from his MPs over the proposals, with one Tory frontbencher telling the Guardian they were considering their position, questioning the point of serving a government that was not pursuing the 2019 party manifesto.

Speaking on Sky News, Zahawi said he was "not comfortable with breaking any manifesto promises" but refused to be drawn on the specifics of the funding.

He also conceded that the NHS backlog would "increase before it gets better" despite an extra £5.4bn cash injection announced overnight for the NHS for the next six months.

Asked whether the reforms would work, Zahawi said: "You have to at least have a really good go at making sure you fix the system.

"It would be presumptuous, and I think completely arrogant, to say 'of course it will fix the problem'. The right thing to do is deliver the reform and the investment into social care – you've got to make sure that is operational.

"But I'm being respectful and cautious and not being arrogant to say 'of course, yes, everything will be fixed in five minutes' – it won't, in terms of the NHS backlog.

"We will tackle it, we want to reduce it but it will increase before it gets better, but we are putting the resources, the money that we announced yesterday – the additional £5.4bn, taking the total for this year alone of additional support for the NHS to £34bn – will go some way to addressing the backlog."

On Tuesday, the prime minister will frame the tax increase, which could raise up to £10bn a year with a 1.25% rise in national insurance contributions (NICs) for employers and employees, as essential to combat the NHS waiting list crisis.

In the long term, funding will be used for social care costs once a patient reaches a costs cap, thought to be about £80,000. Under the current system, anyone with assets of over £23,350 funds their care in full, and about one in seven people pay over £100,000.

After significant cabinet wrangling, plans were signed off on Monday night for the new social care and NHS funding package that Johnson will present to cabinet on Tuesday followed by a statement to parliament.

Sir Andrew Dilnot, who led a landmark commission into the provision of social care under David Cameron, and reported his findings in 2011, said the proposed reforms had the potential to be “transformational”.

He told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “I think there’s a real chance we’ve finally got there. This is something that has been necessary, reform here has been necessary for at least 25 years and so if we have got there then that would certainly be a day to celebrate.”

Asked if he was comfortable breaking manifesto pledges, Zahawi said he did not want to pre-empt the prime minister. “I’m not comfortable with breaking any manifesto promises,” he added.

Ahead of the announcement, the prime minister will warn MPs that the NHS is at crisis point. “The NHS is the pride of our United Kingdom, but it has been put under enormous strain by the pandemic. We cannot expect it to recover alone,” Johnson said in comments released overnight.

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[Texas](#)

UN experts condemn Texas abortion law as sex discrimination ‘at its worst’



Texans protest abortion ban in Houston on Saturday. Photograph: Reginald Mathalone/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[Ed Pilkington](#) in New York

[@edpilkington](#)

Tue 7 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

United Nations human rights monitors have strongly condemned the state of Texas for its [new anti-abortion law](#), which they say violates international law by denying women control over their own bodies and endangering their lives.

In damning remarks to the Guardian, Melissa Upreti, the chair of the [UN’s working group on discrimination against women and girls](#), criticized the new

Texas law, [SB 8](#), as “structural sex and gender-based discrimination at its worst”.

She warned that the legislation, which bans abortions at about six weeks, could force abortion providers underground and drive women to seek unsafe procedures that could prove fatal.

“This new law will make abortion unsafe and deadly, and create a whole new set of risks for women and girls. It is profoundly discriminatory and violates a number of rights guaranteed under international law,” the human rights lawyer from Nepal said.

Upreti, one of five independent experts charged by the UN human rights council in Geneva to push for elimination of discrimination against women and girls around the world, was also sharply critical of the [US supreme court](#).

Last week the court’s rightwing majority [decided by a five to four vote](#) to allow the Texas law to [go ahead](#), despite the provision’s blatant disregard of the court’s own 1973 ruling legalizing abortion in the US, Roe v Wade.

“The law and the way it came about – through the refusal of the US supreme court to block it based on existing legal precedent – has not only taken [Texas](#) backward, but in the eyes of the international community, it has taken the entire country backward,” Upreti said.

Reem Alsalem, the UN’s special rapporteur on violence against women, advising and reporting to the Human Rights Council and its member states on the issue, was also scathing of the supreme court’s decision to allow the Texas law to stand. She accused the five rightwing justices who formed the majority – and who include [all three of Donald Trump’s appointees](#) – of exposing women to potential violence.

“Through this decision the supreme court of the United States has chosen to trample on the protection of women’s reproductive rights, thereby exposing them and abortion service providers to more violence,” Alsalem told the Guardian.

Women of color, those with low incomes and from other vulnerable groups would bear the brunt of the crackdown, she pointed out.

Alsalem singled out as especially egregious the element of the Texas law that makes abortions all but impossible even for women who become pregnant because of [rape and incest](#). “That exacerbates their trauma as well as mental and physical suffering.”

Chief justice John Roberts joined the three justices on the liberal wing of the supreme court in dissenting against the majority’s refusal to block the Texas law, with all four [issuing strong statements](#).

Under SB 8, some 7 million Texan women are estimated to be at risk of losing access to legal abortions. Health clinics offering the service have already begun to [turn patients away](#).

SB 8 bans all abortions after initial cardiac activity can be detected in the fetus, usually at around six weeks of pregnancy. Legislation to ban abortion so early are often evocatively [but misleadingly](#) called heartbeat bills, even though at that stage the heart has not yet formed.

The cut-off is so early that many women would not be aware that they are even pregnant, and up to 90% of all terminations in the state are expected to blocked.

Roe v Wade led the way to legal abortion up to the stage where a fetus can survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks into the pregnancy.

Another contentious aspect of the new Texas law is that it transfers responsibility for enforcing the new rules from state officials to ordinary citizens who are encouraged to sue anyone who [“aids” or “abets”](#) an abortion, with bounties of \$10,000 and their legal fees paid if the lawsuit succeeds.

Under international law, governments are allowed to regulate voluntary terminations of pregnancy. But they are not allowed to do so in ways that jeopardize the lives or women, subject them to physical or mental pain or

suffering, discriminate against them or arbitrarily interfere with their privacy.

Human rights bodies have long acknowledged that denying women access to abortion by criminalizing the practice or by erecting other hurdles can in certain circumstances amount to cruel, degrading and inhumane treatment. Abortion bans have even been likened by international bodies to a form of torture.

In 2015 the UN working group on discrimination against women conducted an official visit to the US to probe the position and treatment of women in American society.

In their final report, the human rights experts expressed regret that American women have “seen their rights to sexual and reproductive health significantly eroded... Ever-increasing barriers are being created to prevent their access to abortion procedures.”

Upreti told the Guardian that since that visit, the situation in the US had deteriorated further.

“We notified the US administration that the imposition of new barriers to access to abortion services constitutes discrimination under international law, yet the retrogression has continued,” she said.

This article was amended on 8 September 2021 to include Reem Alsalem’s official title.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/sep/07/un-experts-condemn-texas-anti-abortion-law>

Education

Extreme views and conspiracism rising among England's pupils, research finds



Although extremist views remain rare, more than half of the teachers interviewed by researchers had heard pupils express far-right views in their classroom. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Rachel Hall](#)

[@rachela_hall](#)

Tue 7 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Teachers are reporting a rise in extremist views and conspiracy theories among pupils, which they warn will be left to fester unless schools equip them with training and resources to tackle dangerous thinking and ideologies, according to research.

The government's approach to tackling extremism is too focused on identifying and [reporting pupils thought to be at risk of radicalisation](#), rather

than teaching pupils how to reject and discuss hateful views and ideologies, the teachers who were interviewed by researchers at UCL's Institute of Education said.

They added that the teaching of extremism in UK schools was “highly variable” and sometimes “superficial” and “tokenistic”, with teachers in a “babysitter” role that involved using “pre-prepared scripts”. The current approach is rarely sufficient to tackle the rise in pupils looking at disinformation and hateful content online, they said.

Kamal Hanif, an expert on preventing violent extremism in schools and a trustee of Since 9/11, which commissioned the research, said: “This is a wake-up call for us all. We must make sure that every pupil is taught how to reject extremist beliefs and ideologies.

“We know that right now extremists are trying to lure young people into a world of hatred and violence, both online and in person. We must use the power of education to fight back and help young people stand up and reject extremism and violence. We need far more clarity from government about the need to have time in the curriculum for frank and open discussions about extremism.”

The researchers interviewed 96 teachers in schools in England and found that, although extremist views remain rare, more than half of teachers had heard pupils express far-right views in their classroom, while around three-quarters had heard misogynistic or Islamophobic opinions, and nearly all had heard racist language. Almost 90% had heard conspiracy theories such as American tech tycoon [Bill Gates “controlled people via microchips in Covid vaccines”](#).

Teachers reported worrying about broaching certain sensitive topics out of fear they would “get it ‘wrong’”, especially on race. A fifth of the teachers didn’t feel confident dealing with conspiracy theories and far-right extremism.

The UCL researchers recommended that schools strengthen their anti-discrimination policies; promote opportunities for pupils to openly discuss controversial viewpoints, where these can be challenged; and improve the

teaching of critical literacy to help them understand the difference between fact and opinion, and the forces which shape the latter. They stressed that teaching fundamental British values, a cornerstone of the government's anti-extremism approach, was not a panacea, but rather could be a starting point for useful discussions.

In August, the Guardian revealed a [worrying rise](#) in the number of children being radicalised by far-right groups, with 13% of terrorism arrests in the last financial year of youths under 18, compared with 5% the year before. Young people under the age of 24 accounted for nearly 60% of extreme rightwing terror arrests, representing a rapid rise.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, called on the government to work with schools to provide the time, training and resources teachers need to tackle the rise in extremist views.

"The reality is that schools have to juggle multiple demands on their time in the context of packed timetables and severe funding constraints, all at a time when our society has undergone a digital revolution which allows people to spread hateful views at the click of a button," he said.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: "As this report shows, schools and teachers are generally confident teaching about issues related to extremism.

"The new Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum requires secondary age pupils to be aware of laws relating to terrorism—and hate crime, and the Educate Against Hate website features over 150 free resources to help pupils, teachers and parents tackle radicalisation in all its forms."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/sep/07/extreme-views-and-conspiracyism-rising-among-englands-pupils-research-finds>

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[Global development](#)

‘Our children are hungry’: economic crisis pushes Afghans to desperation



People sell their household goods at a market in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, due to the economic insufficiency. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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Nanna Muus Steffensen in Mazar-e-Sharif

Tue 7 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

Yasemeen sits in the back of an open trailer with a bundle of her family's old clothes wrapped in scarves and some used notebooks already full of a child's handwriting. The vehicle pulls over in a busy roundabout in central Mazar-e-Sharif, a city that until the [Taliban takeover](#) last month was known as the economic powerhouse of northern [Afghanistan](#).

Now, it is a scene of desperation as Afghanistan's economic crisis sends ordinary people like Yasemeen on to the street to sell their last possessions.

As Yasemeen lifts the hem of her burqa slightly to climb off the trailer, young men quickly gather around to help unload the goods. They may be meagre, but her only hope is to sell them to make enough money to send family members to Kabul to find work. Her husband, a painter and decorator, has been unemployed for months.

“Our men are sitting at home, and our children are hungry,” says Yasemeen, who only agrees to give her first name.

Her family is just one of many that have taken to the streets to try to raise much-needed cash. On the side of the road it looks as if entire homes have been emptied on to the asphalt, where teapots, cushions, books and teddy bears have been hastily laid out for sale.



A second hand market where people sell their worldly belongings in Mazar-e-Sharif. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Since the [Taliban takeover of Kabul](#) on 15 August, concerns over financial collapse have risen in Afghanistan. With banks closed for weeks and [ATMs out of cash](#), even those Afghans with savings haven't been able to take out their money. Fear of the new order in the streets, where Taliban fighters now patrol, have made many people decide to spend more time at home, forcing shops and restaurants to close.

In the vacuum between the old government and the new Taliban administration, many state employees are not being paid. Even before the Taliban took control of the country, about half the population, 18 million people, was [dependent on humanitarian aid to survive](#), according to the United Nations.

After the [Taliban](#) takeover, the UN secretary general António Guterres warned of a humanitarian catastrophe looming in Afghanistan. The new

level of economic hardship is clearly visible in the streets of Mazar-e-Sharif.

On a dusty asphalt strip between two busy lanes of traffic, Haji Nader, 70, sits next to a pile of kitchenware spread out on a dusty piece of cloth. He buys his goods from families who need money for food or who are trying to raise capital to flee the country, he says.

“These things used to belong to families who want to go to Turkey, Europe or Canada. A lot of people are trying to leave now,” Haji says from under the shade of an umbrella. “The new government should create jobs for the citizens because people are very poor. You see them here trying to sell their things just to be able to buy four or five pieces of bread.”

Afghanistan’s fragile economy is dependent on foreign aid. The World Bank and IMF both halted funding for their projects in the country in response to the Taliban gaining control of the capital.

“We are deeply concerned about the situation in Afghanistan and the impact on the country’s development prospects, especially for women,” said World Bank spokesperson Marcela Sanchez-Bender to CNN Business after the insurgent group took Kabul.

But many Afghans believe that cutting Afghanistan off from international economic support will impact ordinary people, rather than the Taliban. According to the World Bank, foreign economic support covers 75% of public spending. Already government employees such as teachers and nurses say they are not getting paid by the new Taliban administration, which is yet to announce a formal government structure.

“I don’t care if the Taliban forces me to wear a burqa. I’m Afghan, I wear burqa and hijab anyway,” says Shaparak, a mother of 10, adding: “The problem now is that nobody in this country has a job”.

She is chatting to some friends in a small shop selling hairspray, buttons, teapots and scarfs. The owner of the shop, 34-year-old Maryam, says business has been slow for several months, and has taken a significant blow

since the Taliban takeover of the city on 14 August, the day before the group took control of Kabul.

“The US and other countries only took the rich people with them. The rest of us are still here, they left us in poverty,” Maryam says.

Like many women, she worries what kind of new laws the Taliban is going to implement and how they will influence women’s lives. However, she does not plan to shut down her shop and has not changed the way she dresses.

“If the Taliban stops women from working, maybe we will stand against them, because we need to work. Who would not like to relax at home with enough money, not having to work? But I work for my child, I have to work,” she says.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/sep/07/our-children-are-hungry-economic-crisis-pushes-afghans-to-desperation>



Illustration: Pete Reynolds/The Guardian

[The long read](#)

The disastrous voyage of Satoshi, the world's first cryptocurrency cruise ship

Illustration: Pete Reynolds/The Guardian

by [Sophie Elmhirst](#)

Tue 7 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

On the evening of 7 December 2010, in a hushed San Francisco auditorium, former Google engineer [Patri Friedman](#) sketched out the future of humanity. The event was hosted by the Thiel Foundation, established four years earlier by the arch-libertarian PayPal founder Peter Thiel to “defend and promote freedom in all its dimensions”. From behind a large lectern, Friedman – grandson of Milton Friedman, one of the most influential free-market economists of the last century – laid out his plan. He wanted to transform how and where we live, to abandon life on land and all our decrepit

assumptions about the nature of society. He wanted, quite simply, to start a new city in the middle of the ocean.

Friedman called it seasteading: “Homesteading the high seas,” a phrase borrowed from Wayne Gramlich, a software engineer with whom he’d founded the Seasteading Institute in 2008, helped by a \$500,000 donation from Thiel. In a four-minute vision-dump, Friedman explained his rationale. Why, he asked, in one of the most advanced countries in the world, were they still using systems of government from 1787? (“If you drove a car from 1787, it would be a horse,” he pointed out.) Government, he believed, needed an upgrade, like a software update for a phone. “Let’s think of government as an industry, where countries are firms and citizens are customers!” he declared.

The difficulty in starting a new form of government, said Friedman, was simply a lack of space. All the land on Earth was taken. What they needed was a new frontier, and that frontier was the ocean. “Let a thousand nations bloom on the high seas,” he proclaimed, with Maoish zeal. He wanted seasteading experiments to start as soon as possible. Within three to six years, he imagined ships being repurposed as floating medical clinics. Within 10 years, he predicted, small communities would be permanently based on platforms out at sea. In a few decades, he hoped there would be floating cities “with millions of people pioneering different ways of living together”.

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Politics would be rewritten. The beauty of seasteading was that it offered its inhabitants total freedom and choice. In 2017, Friedman and the “seavangelist” Joe Quirk wrote a book, *Seasteading*, in which they described how a seasteading community could constantly rearrange itself according to the choices of those who owned the individual floating units. (Quirk now runs the Seasteading Institute; Friedman remains chair of the board.) “Democracy,” the two men wrote, “would be upgraded to a system whereby the smallest minorities, including the individual, could vote with their houses.”

In the decade following Friedman's talk, a variety of attempts to realise his seasteading vision were all thwarted. "Seavilization," to use his phrase, remained a fantasy. Then, in October 2020, it seemed his dream might finally come true, when three seasteading enthusiasts bought a 245-metre-long cruise ship called the Pacific Dawn. Grant Romundt, Rüdiger Koch and Chad Elwartowski planned to sail the ship to [Panama](#), where they were based, and park it permanently off the coastline as the centrepiece of a new society trading only in cryptocurrencies. In homage to Satoshi Nakamoto, the pseudonym of bitcoin's mysterious inventor (or inventors), they renamed the ship the MS Satoshi. They hoped it would become home to people just like them: digital nomads, startup founders and early bitcoin adopters.

Their vision was utopian, if your idea of utopia is a floating crypto-community in the Caribbean Sea. No longer was seasteading a futuristic ideal; it was, said Romundt, "an actual ship". The Satoshi also offered a chance to marry two movements, of crypto-devotees and seasteaders, united by their desire for freedom – from convention, regulation, tax. Freedom from the state in all its forms. But converting a cruise ship into a new society proved more challenging than envisaged. The high seas, while appearing borderless and free, are, in fact, some of the most tightly regulated places on Earth. The cruise ship industry in particular is bound by intricate rules. As Romundt put it: "We were like, 'This is just so *hard*.'"

As with many stories about techno-libertarian fantasies, the tale of the Satoshi begins in an all-male, quasi-frat house in San Francisco in the late 90s. Romundt – a softly spoken Canadian with the optimistic, healthy glow of someone who combines entrepreneurial success with water sports – was living with a bunch of software engineers, all of whom shared an intense dedication to personal improvement. "I was a *huge* Tony Robbins fan," Romundt told me in one of several Zoom calls from his office in Panama. (Robbins' themes of individual freedom, self-mastery and the accrual of significant wealth are evident from the titles of his books from that time: Unlimited Power; Lessons in Mastery; Unleash the Power Within; The Power to Shape Your Destiny, and, next level, Awaken the Giant Within.)

After his San Francisco stint, Romundt, the son of a hairdresser, created ScissorBoy in 2009, a popular online TV series on hairdressing, and then

ScheduleBox, a website which offered a digital receptionist service for hairstylists to book in their clients. (Always digitally inclined, he had, according to his website, the world’s “most advanced mobile paperless office in 1995”.) “I used to work 17 hours a day, so I didn’t have a lot of freedom,” he told me. He did, however, make enough money to semi-retire in 2016 and then spent “no more than five hours a month” running his business. The giant fully awakened, he moved back to Canada, where he lived on a houseboat on Lake Ontario and went kayaking in the mornings as the sun came up. Enraptured by his lifestyle, Romundt wondered why everyone wasn’t living this way. On a flight one day, he saw a man wearing a T-shirt with “Stop arguing. Start seasteading” printed on it. Romundt was curious, they got talking, and the man turned out to be Joe Quirk, who was by this time running the Seasteading Institute.

So far, the Seasteading Institute had experienced variable, or zero, success with its projects. Early ideas for a “Baystead” and “Coaststead” off the coast of San Francisco and a “Clubstead”, a resort off the coast of California, never made the leap to reality. An attempt to create a floating island prototype in [French Polynesia](#) in 2017 met with fairly fierce resistance from the people of French Polynesia and collapsed a year later when the government pulled out of the scheme.

After meeting Quirk, Romundt decided he wanted to try again. Quirk introduced him to two other aspiring seasteaders, the passionately libertarian American Elwartowski and the bitcoin-wealthy German engineer Koch. Together, the trio founded a company, Ocean Builders. Using their own money, they funded the first attempt at a single residential seastead, in the form of a floating white octagonal box 12 nautical miles off the coast of [Thailand](#). Elwartowski and his girlfriend, Nadia Summergirl, lived there for two months in early 2018, until the Thai government discovered the seastead’s existence and declared it a threat to the country’s independence, possibly punishable by life imprisonment or death. Elwartowski and Summergirl had to flee the country before the Thai navy dispatched three ships to dismantle the floating box.



Renders of a SeaPod community. Photograph: Ocean Builders

The seasteading movement did not die there. In 2019, Romundt, Koch and Elwartowski moved their company to Panama, where they had found a government willing to back their next project: the SeaPod. These would be individual floating homes held 3 metres above the water by a single column and a tripod-shaped base beneath the ocean. The man responsible for their design, Koen Olthuis, is a Dutch “aquatect”, an architect specialising in water-based schemes. In rendered drawings, the SeaPods look fantastical, like a giant’s white helmet emerging monstrously from the waves. Inside, every surface is curved, as if you were living within the smooth, colourless confines of a peppermint. Romundt compared the SeaPods to the architecture in *The Jetsons*, the 60s cartoon where the characters lived in glassy orbs in the sky. “It’s like that,” he told me, “but on water.” The team built a factory from scratch in Linton Bay, a marina on the north coast of Panama, hired a team of about 30 engineers and mechanics, and, in early 2020, began building the first SeaPod prototype.

Progress was slow. Even once they had a successful prototype, Romundt predicted the factory would only make two SeaPods a month. They’d had the idea before of buying a cruise ship – a quick way of scaling up the community – but the cost had always been prohibitive. By autumn 2020, though, the situation had changed. Like many parts of the travel industry, [the](#)

[cruise ship business was collapsing](#) because of the pandemic: multiple cruise lines were going into administration, empty ships filling up ports like abandoned cars in a scrubby field, or being sent to the scrapyard. Cruise ships, the Ocean Builders trio realised, would be going cheap.

Sure enough, they found a bargain. In October 2020, Romundt, Koch and Elwartowski bought the ex-P&O cruise ship Pacific Dawn for a reported \$9.5m. (Built in 1991 for \$280m, the ship could have sold pre-pandemic for more than \$100m, one industry insider told me.) They instructed Olthuis to draw up the plans, placing the ship at the heart of a floating community surrounded by SeaPods. “We had a kind of funny idea,” Olthuis told me. In his scheme, the Satoshi would connect, via two looping tunnels on the water, to human-made floating platforms designated for agriculture, manufacturing and parkland. From the air, the whole community would form the shape of the bitcoin B.

The scheme had the support of the Panama government. In fact, the Ministry of Tourism hoped that a new ocean community would be a draw for visitors. In a page-long statement, the ministry told me how a floating development fitted in with its Sustainable Tourism Masterplan 2020-2025, by highlighting the country’s biodiversity and “the blue heritage of Panama”. It didn’t seem to mind the idea of a load of crypto-investors floating off their coastline, not paying any tax.

“Out of adversity comes opportunity, so they say,” wrote Elwartowski, on 10 October 2020, introducing Viva Vivas, the new company that he had created to run the Satoshi. Its name was adapted from the Latin phrase, “*vive ut vivas*”, meaning “live so that you may live”.

Ten days later, he announced the venture on Reddit: “So, I am buying a cruise ship and naming it MS Satoshi … AMA.” The responses were quick (“Need an apprentice aviation mechanic?” “I know how to use a yo-yo! Any room for me??”) and included the inevitable sceptics. (“Anyone remember the good old days of the Fyre festival?”) But plenty took the proposition seriously and wanted to go over the small print. (“Where is power coming from? Gas? Internet? Food? Water? Toiletries? What taxes will she be subject to?”)

Elwartowski answered every question with grave attention to detail. There would be generators at first, followed quickly by solar power. This would be an eco-friendly crypto-ship. High-speed wireless internet would come from land; utilities would be included in the fees at first, but would be metered when the systems were upgraded: “You don’t want to have pay for someone else’s mining rig in their cabin,” he wrote, referring to the [resource-intensive computational process](#) that introduces new crypto “coins” into the system. As for tax, you would not pay any on earnings made from ventures based in territory beyond Panama. You would be free to make, or mine, as much money as you liked. It would be a remote worker’s regulatory paradise.

But as the Reddit Q&A continued, Elwartowski’s meticulous responses revealed some of the more knotty practicalities of life on board. It turned out that the only cooking facilities would be in the restaurant. For safety reasons, no one was allowed to have a microwave in their rooms – though some cabins had mini-fridges, noted Elwartowski, determinedly sidestepping the point. He offered residents a 20% discount at the restaurant and mentioned that some interested cruisers had already talked about renting part of the restaurant kitchen so they could make their own food. “We want entrepreneurs to come up with solutions and try them out,” he wrote, in a valiant attempt to convert a fairly fundamental stumbling block into wild startup energy. “This is your place to try new things.” Not all the Redditors were convinced. “No microwave but mining rig. Incoherent scam.”



The Pacific Dawn, the P&O cruise ship which later became the MS Satoshi.
Photograph: Dale de la Rey/EPA

Marketing of the Satoshi soon began in earnest. Her 777 cabins were to be auctioned off between 5 and 28 November, while the ship was crossing the Atlantic towards Panama. Viva Vivas listed the options, including cabins with no windows (\$570 a month), an ocean view (\$629), or a balcony (\$719). Ocean Builders held a series of live video calls for potential customers which attracted 200 people at a time, Olthuis told me, with Romundt, an expert steward of the multilateral video call, at the helm.

On the Viva Vivas website, a Frequently Asked Questions page covered the basics of the cabin auction process, fees and logistics. Specially trained staff would be hired to keep the ship Covid-free and through a partnership with a platform called coinpayments.net, multiple cryptocurrencies would be supported for payment, including bitcoin, ethereum, digibyte, bitcoin cash, litecoin, dai, dash, ethereum classic, trueUSD, USD coin, tether, bitcoin SV, electroneum, cloak, doge, eureka coin, xem and monero.

The final entry on the FAQ page, regarding the possibility of having pets on board, gave a bracing insight into the tension between the idea of freedom and the reality of hundreds of people closely cohabiting on a cruise ship. The answer linked to a separate document, containing a 14-point list of

conditions including one that declared no animal should exceed 20lbs in weight, and any barking or loud noises could not last for longer than 10 minutes. If a pet repeatedly disturbed the peace – more than three times a month or five times in a year – it would no longer be allowed to live on board. “Any pet related conflict,” instructed point 13, “shall be resolved in accordance with Section V (F) of the Satoshi Purchase Agreement or Section IV (F) of the Satoshi Master Lease, where applicable.” Dogs would only be permitted in balcony cabins, and it was advised that owners buy a specific brand of “porch potty”, a basket of fake grass where your pet could relieve itself. (Pet waste thrown overboard would result in a \$200 fine.)

One Reddit respondent – maxcoiner on Reddit, Luke Parker in real life – was as close to the target market of the Satoshi as it was possible to imagine. A longtime follower of the seasteading movement, he was also such an early and successful bitcoin adopter that he and his wife were able to retire early thanks to their investments. The Satoshi was the most plausible idea for a seastead he’d ever heard. “I did not buy a room during the Satoshi’s sale window,” he told me over email, “but it was hard to keep my hand off that button.”

A variety of considerations held him back. “The wife,” as he put it, had her doubts. He wasn’t sure about the “ginormous leap down in luxury” from living in deep residential comfort on land in the US midwest to living in a very small cabin on board a 30-year-old cruise ship. He was worried, too, by the limited facilities – “No kitchen of my own? Tiny bathrooms? Tiny everything?” Also, the constant rocking of the ship on the water: “I just can’t stomach that life around the clock.” He preferred the idea of the SeaPods. If Parker was going to live on a boat, he concluded, he’d prefer to buy his own luxury catamaran.

On 29 November, Elwartowski published another post on the Viva Vivas website, announcing the official opening of the Satoshi in January 2021. “This will be a new experience for all of us so we must manage your expectations,” he warned. The novelty was too much for Parker. “It takes a rare kind of person indeed to move your life on to a deserted cruise ship in Central America with so little information up front,” he told me. If Parker, part of that highly select, freedom-seeking, system-abandoning, overlapping community of seasteaders and bitcoiners, wasn’t going to buy, it was hard to

imagine who would. As he put it: “This may have been the smallest sales demographic in history.”

Over 30 years of service, the Satoshi herself had seen enough of the world to know every permutation of life at sea – apart, perhaps from what it might be like to be a permanent home to 2,000 crypto-investors. Built in 1991 in the Fincantieri shipyard in Trieste, Italy, she is one of only two cruise ships designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano. (The other, the Crown Princess, was sent to the scrapyard last year, a Covid casualty.) Her first incarnation was as the Regal Princess (owned by Princess Cruises), after which she became the Pacific Dawn (P&O Australia). Throughout her life, she has been admired for her distinctive features: a domed roof rising above the navigation bridge, water slides that curl round her funnel and a stern whose elegantly rounded form is in marked contrast to the blunt, sawn-off rears of some giant cruise liners. Those who prefer an understated cruising experience also appreciate her discreet size: compared to the largest cruise ship in the world, The Symphony of the Seas (18 decks, 23 swimming pools) she is a modest vessel (11 decks, two swimming pools).

For many years, the Pacific Dawn cruised the south Pacific, enjoying a serene phase of life, interrupted only by an onboard swine flu outbreak in 2009 and the time she lost power and came within 70 metres of crashing into the Gateway Bridge on the Brisbane River. In 2011, a devoted Facebook group was established by fans. “Dawnie was the party ship,” remembered one. “I fell in love with my wife all over again,” added another, crediting the ship for his romantic renewal. Then, in 2020, it briefly looked as though Dawnie was set to join her sister on the scrapyard, after her sale to British cruise company, Cruise and Maritime Voyages, collapsed in the pandemic. Her fans were grief-stricken, weeping emojis piling up on the Facebook group. (“Well 2020 just became even shittier,” said Kathie.) When it was revealed that the ship had been rescued by Ocean Builders, there was a wave of relief, if a little mystification at her new name. “She’ll always be Dawn to me.”

On 29 October 2020, Dawn began her journey to Panama, sailing from Limassol, Cyprus to Piraeus, Greece. A week later, she was handed over to her new owners Ocean Builders and officially became the Satoshi. Koch

flew over from Panama to cross the Atlantic aboard their new purchase. The team hired a management company, Columbia Cruise Services, to run the ship and provide a minimum crew of about 40 people, mostly Ukrainian, including a cook, engineers and cleaning staff. A seasoned British cruise captain, Peter Harris, arrived to take charge. “We didn’t know anything about running a cruise,” Romundt told me, “so it was like, we didn’t want to have to figure all this stuff out.”

As soon as Capt Harris joined the ship and met Koch on board, he realised there would be challenges ahead. “I was thinking a week into the job, I can see I’m going to be resigning,” Harris told me, immaculate in a striped shirt on a video call from his home in Kent. Koch, he said, was admirable in his ambition, and a likable, law-abiding man, but he was naive about how shipping worked and had an abhorrence of rules. “He didn’t understand the industry,” said Harris, who has the frank, upbeat air of a born leader for whom hierarchy is a kind of creed. “He just thought he could treat it like his own yacht.”

To sail anywhere, Harris explained, a ship requires certificates of seaworthiness. These expired on the day the deal with P&O was completed. Usually, a new buyer would ensure they lasted a couple of months to cover any onward journey, but no one on the Ocean Builders side had checked. By the time Columbia Cruise Services came on board and informed the team of the situation, the contracts had all been signed. Before the Satoshi could cross the Atlantic, the team were obliged to sail the ship to Gibraltar and have her removed from the water, a process known as dry-docking, to perform essential repairs and renew the certificates.

The Atlantic crossing began on 3 December. Harris – who didn’t resign, grateful for the four-month contract mid-pandemic – found it oddly lovely. With only 40 or so people on board, rather than the usual 2,000-odd, the atmosphere was relaxed, if a little surreal. Among other things, P&O had left about 5,000 bottles of wine and 2,000 bottles of spirits on board. Harris asked Koch if he wanted to charge the crew for drinks, but Koch, generous by nature, said no. “Obviously, we restricted them to three drinks a day,” said Harris. “Otherwise, I wouldn’t have had a crew.”

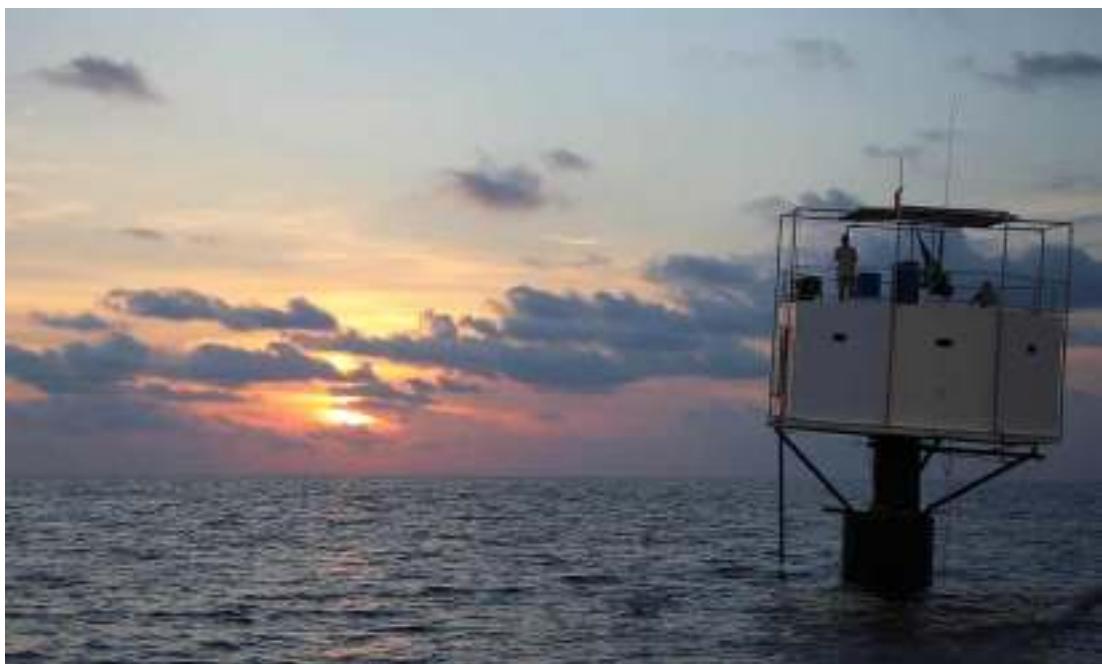
As the crossing continued, questions about how the project would actually work once the Satoshi arrived in Panama grew more pressing. According to Harris, Elwartowski thought he could convince the Panamanian authorities to let the ship anchor permanently in its waters and de-register as a ship, becoming a floating residence instead, so as to avoid some of the more exacting requirements of maritime law. But while Panama was happy to have the ship moored off its coast, it specified that the ship had to remain officially designated as a ship. Which led to another difficulty: the discharge of sewage. Though the ship had an advanced wastewater management system, which could turn sewage into drinking-quality water, they were not permitted to discharge this wastewater into Panamanian waters, and so would have had to sail 12 miles out every 20 days or so to empty tanks into international waters.

Such obstacles made the ship an off-putting proposition for insurers. No one would agree to cover them. “They wouldn’t even tell us why we weren’t insurable, they just kept saying no,” Romundt said. “It’s kind of hard to remedy something if you don’t know what the problem is.” Of the several insurance experts I asked about this, none were willing to comment on the case, citing a lack of expertise, presumably because no one had ever tried to insure a cruise ship turned floating crypto-community before. Harris, however, had his theories: that a risk-averse insurance industry was wary of both a bitcoin business and a ship that would presumably be mostly populated by quick-to-litigate Americans.

After trying multiple insurers and brokers, Romundt began to realise that the cruise ship industry was, as he put it, “plagued by over-regulation”. (Along with airlines and nuclear power, according to Harris, it’s in “the top three”.) The Ocean Builders’ great freedom project, whose intrinsic purpose was to offer an escape from oppressive rules and bureaucracy, was being hobbled by oppressive rules and bureaucracy. As Elwartowski would reflect a few months later on Reddit: “A cruise ship is not very good for people who want to be free.”

To Romundt, the whole cruise ship business began to seem like an impenetrable old boys’ network. He estimated that, given six months, they could have hired a crack marine legal team and navigated a way through the loopholes. But by mid-December, the Satoshi was already halfway across

the Atlantic, burning through gallons of diesel, with a 40-person crew they'd have to keep on board even when she was stationary in Panama because a cruise ship requires constant maintenance. A ship can cost, even when docked, up to \$1m a month to run. "Because, you know," said Romundt, "it's *huge*."



Previous attempts at seasteading had not been successful. Photograph: Denver Hopkins III

Fuel alone was costing the Ocean Builders trio about \$12,000 a day. According to Harris, Koch wanted to try to make the ship more fuel-efficient by installing a smaller engine, which he thought he could do while the ship was at anchor. "We were like, how are you going to cut a hole in the ship's side big enough to get the engine out, which is below water level, and not sink the ship?" Harris shook his head, his memories of Koch clearly fond, if perplexed. "I was forever saying, 'No, Rudi you can't do this; no, Rudi you can't do that.'"

Before the Satoshi hove into view of the white sands of a Panama beach, Romundt, Koch and Elwartowski had to make a call. They couldn't afford to keep the ship moored and empty for months on end while they tried to solve the insurance problem, a problem they weren't even sure they'd be able to solve. They were insured to sail her, and they could go on sailing her, but

they didn't want to run a travel company. They wanted to run a floating society of like-minded freedom-lovers arranged in the shape of the bitcoin B. It wasn't even clear that there were enough people who wanted to do that. Koch admitted to Harris that the cabins weren't selling.

"It was almost like a fantasy, James Bond-ish," said one cruise industry insider. "But to their credit they believed in it."

The dream was over, they realised, before it had even begun. The project was dead, except it wasn't quite, as they still owned the ship, which was still steaming across the Atlantic with Koch, Harris and the crew on board. The Satoshi, already thousands of miles into a 5,500-nautical-mile voyage, had travelled too far to be turned around mid-ocean, so on she sailed. They'd have to sell her, the Ocean Builders realised, but who was going to be crazy enough to buy a cruise ship in the middle of a pandemic? Only a company who wanted to tear her apart. On 18 December, while she was still at sea, the team announced the sale of the Satoshi to a scrapyard in Alang, India. The Satoshi was once again destined for dismemberment.

On 19 December, Elwartowski announced on the Viva Vivas website that the Satoshi's journey was coming to an end. "We have lost this round. The New Normal, Great Reset gains another victim," he wrote, looping in the collapse of the Satoshi with a popular Covid conspiracy theory that the pandemic and its response had been stage-managed by a global elite. (Over subsequent months, Elwartowski's activity on Reddit would include other Covid themes, including [suspicion](#) of government vaccination programmes.) Romundt emailed their list of potential customers to let them know the ship's fate. Deposits for cabins would be refunded.

The Satoshi arrived in Balboa, Panama on 22 December. On Christmas Eve, she anchored off the coast of Colon. There, Romundt joined Koch and the crew on the ship. Elwartowski, meanwhile, stayed in Panama City. "He didn't want to get on board," said Romundt. Koch spoke to Joe Quirk one evening on the phone while he was sitting in the ship's cafe drinking a bottle of wine, feeling regretful that the onboard hospital he'd planned to open to medical entrepreneurs would never come to life. Even so, Koch was "utterly

unbowed”, reported Quirk in a Seasteading Institute blog post entitled [How the Grinch Stole the Cruise Ship](#).

Romundt, a man more driven by the practical issues at hand than the romantic symbolism of his endeavours, realised that, though the entire plan had fallen apart, he was still the part-owner of a massive cruise ship. He decided to spend Christmas on board, along with the crew. Master key in hand, he wandered around the Satoshi, making sure to enter every room that said Do Not Enter. He toured the engine room, and sat on the sun deck. He worked, because he can’t help working, even at Christmas, but he also went on all the water slides, alone. (Harris told me he’d turned them on specially for Christmas Day.) Though Romundt doesn’t usually drink, he had a glass of wine and called all his friends saying, “I’m on my own cruise ship for Christmas!” He had the kind of good time it is perhaps only possible to have when you have just made an unbelievably expensive mistake born of a desire to invent an entirely new way of living and involving the purchase of a huge floating vessel. “I was king of the ship!” he said, still delighted.

Even scrapping the Satoshi proved to be a debacle. After a deal had been done with the Indian scrapyard, the Ocean Builders team realised that according to the Basel Convention, which covers the disposal of hazardous waste, they weren’t allowed to send the ship from a signatory country (Panama) to a non-signatory country (India). The contract with the scrapyard had to be cancelled.

All was not completely lost, at least for the Satoshi herself. The cruise ship industry is a compact ecosystem. The grapevine did its thing. A ship broker heard about the plight of the Satoshi, realised it was precisely the kind of ship a new client of his was looking for, and did a quick deal.

The client was Ambassador Cruise Line, the first British cruise company to launch for 10 years. According to Ambassador’s ebullient, red-sweatered chair, Gordon Wilson, the company’s name is intended to reflect the highly optimistic idea that ambassadors, like cruise ships, take the best of their own culture with them wherever they go. The Satoshi would be the first ship in the company’s new fleet, which would offer cruises to the over-50s. Many of the new team at Ambassador had come over from Cruise and Maritime

Voyages, who had nearly bought the Satoshi before it went bust in 2020. As such, they knew the ship well, which sped up the sale. Wilson wouldn't confirm the amount – "they thought it was a good price" – but the trade press reported that Ocean Builders sold her for \$12m, more than they paid for her, though possibly not quite enough to cover the elaborate costs of running an empty cruise ship for three months.

On 23 February 2021, the Satoshi set sail from Panama, heading all the way back across the ocean she'd just crossed. She arrived in Bar, Montenegro on 27 March. Wilson went over to visit her, and, like Romundt, relished the experience of climbing aboard his new asset. Exploring the engine rooms of an empty cruise ship seemed to give these men a particular sensation: perhaps just the buzz of owning something so vast and powerful; a mechanical, proprietary thrill.

The Ocean Builders team, meanwhile, returned to their own private missions. Elwartowski was on sabbatical, Romundt told me. He did not want to talk to me for this story. Koch, who also declined to be interviewed, was building his own boat in Panama, and working with Romundt on the SeaPods. Over Zoom, Romundt gave me a tour of the SeaPod factory, and showed off the hulking sheets of fibreglass that would form the structure's mould. "It feels like touching a UFO," he said, stroking his invention.

Seeing the pod's nascent form, I felt a boringly pragmatic urge to ask Romundt what happened if, once afloat, you needed to buy a pint of milk. My question seemed to miss the point, too wedded to old-fashioned notions of locality and human connection. The Pods had been designed to have a hatch in the roof, Romundt said. He was talking to some drone creators and imagined people flying to their pods independently, landing on the roof and entering through the hatch. Perhaps that's how you'd get your milk.

At her new home in Montenegro, meanwhile, the Satoshi needed some sprucing up. For the fourth time in her three decades on the water, she had been renamed. "We thought Ambience a lovely name for a ship," said Wilson, pronouncing it in the French style, *Ambi-ence*. "This is a very elegant ship," he added, proudly. "She looks like a cruise liner; she does *not* look like a floating block of flats."

When Ambience finally sets sail on her maiden voyage, from the industrial dock of Tilbury across the North Sea to Hamburg in April 2022, she will offer a more traditional experience to her passengers. “Back to what cruising is all about,” said Wilson. The atmosphere will be refined. There will be promenading on deck and plentiful opportunities for photography as the horizon swallows the evening sun. There will be cocktails at the bar, a five-course dinner and a glittery show. It is unlikely bitcoin will be accepted as currency. The water slides will be removed.

This article was amended on 8 September 2021 to include the full name of Ambassador Cruise Line, and to clarify that the Ambience’s dinners will have five courses, not three.

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Interview

‘There is so much bad behaviour everywhere’: how to raise a good child in a terrible world

[Emine Saner](#)



‘Kindness is strongly associated with success’ ... Melinda Wenner Moyer at home in the Hudson Valley, New York. Photograph: Richard Beaven/The Guardian



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Tue 7 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

When Melinda Wenner Moyer looked around in the autumn of 2018, she saw everywhere what she would describe as “assholes”. [In the US](#) and the UK, hate crime was – and is – rising. Across the world, #MeToo allegations continued to come. Donald Trump was in the White House and “I just felt like there was so much bad behaviour everywhere,” says Moyer. “I started thinking about my kids and worrying about ‘Who were they going to become?’ and ‘What were they learning from this behaviour?’ if they were seeing it on TV or hearing about it from their friends.” Moyer realised: “What I wanted more than anything else was for my kids to not grow up to be assholes.”

Moyer, a science journalist and parenting columnist, decided to go through the research and ended up writing a book with the pleasing title How to Raise Kids Who Aren’t Assholes. In the vast realm of parenting advice, there was plenty on diet, sleep and how to turn your child into a superhuman genius, but not a great deal on how to create a kind, compassionate person.

“I think there are probably a couple of reasons for this,” she says. Some parents have a fear, she believes, that instilling kindness “is going to be to their child’s detriment – they’re going to be walked all over, they’re not going to be successful, it’s going to hold them back in some way. But when I looked at the research on this, it clearly suggested the opposite – that kindness is actually strongly associated with success.

“There was one study where researchers followed boys in particular and found that the boys who were the most helpful and generous in kindergarten ended up earning the most money when they were 25 – and were the least likely to be in prison.”



‘We need to have these conversations’ ... protesters in San Francisco rally against police brutality after the death of George Floyd, June 2020.
Photograph: Josh Edelson/AFP/Getty Images

The other reason, she thinks, is that if parents believe themselves to be good people – in other words, not an asshole (or arsehole, depending on where you are from) – that will be enough to ensure our children will be, too. “I think there is something to that,” she says. Much of her book is about modelling good behaviour. “But I was also surprised by the research that really challenged some of my parenting instincts.”

For instance, in her chapter on raising children who don't become racist – aiming specifically at white parents – Moyer recalls explaining to her then five-year-old daughter why a Black Lives Matter protest, in the wake of [the murder of George Floyd](#), was on the front page of the newspaper. Before she had looked at the research, she would have questioned going into so much detail about racism with her children. There is “the idea that white parents shouldn’t talk about race. The research shows it’s very common that white parents in particular espouse ‘colourblind’ parenting, where we think that if we don’t talk about race with our kids then they won’t see it, they won’t make a big deal out of it, they’ll be less likely to become racist.

“But the research shows that this is not what happens. First of all, we know that, from the age of three months, babies can discern skin colour – and they like to look at pictures of adults who share the same skin colour as their caregivers. So we know that they can see it and that they’re making judgments based on it.”

A lot of parents are so protective of kids in terms of not wanting them to experience failure or make mistakes

When children, being naturally curious, try to make sense of why the world looks the way it does, “they see very easily in our society that most people who have power and prestige and money are white. If parents and teachers aren’t talking about [how] racism is fuelling this hierarchy, then kids come to the simplest conclusion: ‘Well, maybe white people have more power and money because they’re better.’”

Add an embarrassed parent shushing them every time they mention race and “they start to think of race as something bad” – unless parents push back against any stereotypes their child may be developing. A 2011 study cited by Moyer found that children whose (white) parents engaged with them about race became less prejudiced than those whose parents ignored it.

Another area Moyer found counterintuitive was self-esteem. Parents’ well-meaning attempts to boost self-esteem often had the effect of undermining it. “Putting pressure on our kids to do well in school, enrolling them in all the extracurriculars and wanting them to be the best of the best – that

undermines their self-esteem, because then they think of our love for them as being contingent on what they do and how they perform,” she says. “Generally speaking, the feeling of being unconditionally loved is one of the most crucial things for healthy self-esteem.” Being overprotective can also harm it. “I feel a lot of parents now are so protective of kids in terms of not wanting them to experience failure or make mistakes.”

Moyer says she didn’t plan to write a parenting book. “The premise kind of felt obnoxious to me, like: ‘Who am I to tell other parents what to do? I don’t know what I’m doing half the time,’” she says, over a video call from her home in the Hudson Valley, New York, where she lives with her husband, an editor of a science magazine, and their two children, who are 10 and seven.

Her childhood was spent largely in Atlanta, Georgia, where her mother was an interior designer and her father a management consultant. She describes their parenting as being in the “authoritative” style – there were boundaries and last-resort consequences, but an environment of love and empathy (as opposed to the “authoritarian” style, which is characterised by strict rules, discipline and coldness).

Writing the book made her revisit her childhood. She says she was “pleasantly surprised” by a lot of what her parents did. “In the early 80s, there were a lot more authoritarian parents and I think mine got a good balance of giving me respect and letting me make choices, but also having clear boundaries. I think there’s only one point in the book where I called them out for something, which is how they used to compare my sister and me. They used to say that my sister was the gregarious one and I was shy – and that definitely stuck with me.”

After a period working for a biotech company, Moyer became a science journalist and, after her son was born, brought her research skills to a parenting column for *Slate* magazine. It came about, she says with a laugh, because “I had so many questions and I didn’t have any answers … I was like: ‘I’ll use science to get answers.’ Which worked – sometimes.”

I was surprised to read that a lot of kids who bully just don't understand that what they're doing is hurtful

For the book, she worked backwards from the idea of what makes an asshole and what parents can do to nurture opposite traits and values. Fostering generosity and helpfulness can mitigate selfishness (among her strategies, she advises being explicit about what is expected and highlighting the impact of children's actions on other people). As well as chapters on anti-racism, anti-sexism and how to support self-esteem without creating a narcissist, she covers nurturing an honest child, creating harmonious sibling relationships and resilience. "I definitely wanted to include bullying – how do we raise kids who aren't bullies? What do we know about what primes kids to become bullies?"

She was alarmed by her research that suggested the toxic political atmosphere was having an impact. "There was a study around the time of the [2016 US presidential] election that found that, in school districts that were very pro-Trump, there was an increase in bullying rates in schools compared with schools that were more pro-Clinton." She points to work done by the Southern Poverty Law Center on hate crimes after the election, which included teachers who reported that they were seeing more hateful behaviour: "Kids who had actually been saying the exact things that Trump had said, like 'build a wall'. So that's a little bit more evidence that kids were hearing these things and then thinking: 'This is OK to do.'"

While Moyer acknowledges in the book that bullying can often be perpetrated by a child who has seen or experienced domestic violence – indeed, much behaviour that could be described as "asshole-ish" could be explained by horrendous home circumstances – there is a huge number of parents who would be surprised to learn that their child is a bully. One study Moyer cites found that nearly one-third of fifth graders (10- to 11-year-olds) admitted to bullying behaviours, yet only 2% of their parents were aware of it.

One theme of Moyer's book is the importance of being obvious and literal with children. Another is the value of talking about things such as gender,

race, sex and pornography, however awkward it may feel. This also includes things that we, or our children, may not even have considered before. “With the research on bullying, I was surprised to read that a lot of kids who bully just don’t understand that what they’re doing is hurtful,” she says. “We need to have these conversations about the fact that sometimes we can intend one thing, but it will have a different impact.” Laurie Kramer, a psychologist who specialises in sibling relationships, told Moyer that many children didn’t realise that their parents wanted them to get on with their siblings; they needed to be told.

Moyer’s book highlights an uncomfortable truth: that we may have to confront our own asshole-ish tendencies – selfishness, unconscious biases, internalised misogyny, an inability or unwillingness to understand other people’s perspectives – before we can expect the same from our children.

Moyer has put much of her research into practice. She says it has changed her family for the better. She has more patience and tries to see things from her children’s perspectives. They have become more generous and think more about working together and helping each other. “I do feel like my kids have gotten along better since I’ve tried some of the sibling strategies,” she says. “They certainly fight still, but there are times when I will see them negotiating in a way that I never used to – proactively trying to problem-solve. I do feel as if there’s less conflict in the house – and I’m less frustrated and angry than I used to be as a parent. I feel like we’re closer because of that.”

Reassuringly, however, she admits she didn’t become a better parent overnight. It took her, she writes, at least six months to start putting it into practice – and she doesn’t get it right all the time. “I certainly make mistakes or do things in ways where later I’m like: ‘That probably wasn’t the most constructive way to handle it.’” But if she shouts or snaps, or handles a situation unfairly or irrationally, she will apologise.

“Sometimes I ask them for advice, like: ‘What do you think I could have done in that moment that would have been more constructive?’ We’re always correcting our kids; I think they really love it when we ask for help and they can give advice. Also, we’re showing how to apologise and that

everybody makes mistakes. It normalises the fact that we're never going to be perfect and that's OK."

How to Raise Kids Who Aren't Assholes by Melinda Wenner Moyer (Headline, £14.99) is out now. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/sep/07/there-is-so-much-bad-behaviour-everywhere-how-to-raise-a-good-child-in-a-terrible-world>

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Baby, unplugged: can sleep monitors make me a better parent?



‘My doctor has assured me that tracking, after a certain point and in most cases, is medically unnecessary.’ Illustration: Rita Liu/The Guardian

Sophie Brickman

Tue 7 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

When my daughter Ella was little, I'd often see various tech products on my Facebook feed purporting to calm parents who were anxious about their baby's sleep. Next to feeding, there's likely no more anxiety-prone part of the day than a child's bedtime – the fear they're not on a schedule, or that once they get on one, it's the wrong one, or that once they're actually asleep, they might never wake up.

I dismissed them out of hand – we were sharing a room with Ella, and I was aware of her every snort and snuffle, though in retrospect, it seems obvious that we could have had her sleeping through the night a little earlier ... if we'd only settled on a sleep training method.

Whichever one you pick neatly slots you into a parental taxonomy. Are you an adherent of [Dr Richard Ferber's method](#), popularized in the 1980s, which encourages you to let your child "cry it out" until you're popping Xanax like popcorn? Perhaps you're a disciple of [Twelve Hours' Sleep by Twelve Weeks Old](#), which guarantees as much, so long as you're willing to track her food and occasionally force-feed her like a foie gras goose. Or maybe you purchased a California King bed the day you found out you were pregnant, and now all sleep together, your breasts exposed to the night air so Junior can sidle up and have a sip whenever he'd like. We opted for an amalgam of each, and at around four months old Ella successfully dropped the horrible 3am feed.

But by the time our second daughter, Charlotte, was born in 2019, the landscape was a smidge different. The sleep tracker market was booming and my tech-loving husband started sending me links to various products promising us peace and serenity. There was Harvey Karp's Snoo, the \$1,495 smart bassinet that kicks data back to your phone while it jiggles your baby to sleep – sometimes so quickly it looks like she's about to launch from Cape Canaveral. There was the Owlet smart sock, which tracks your child's heart rate as he sleeps and issues an alarm if something is awry. There was the Miku Pro Smart Baby Monitor, which allows you to see, in real time, your baby's "breathing waveform", should that be up your alley.

[Baby, unplugged](#)

I clicked on one, mostly because it seemed to have taken sleep monitoring to Onion headline-level extremes. [The Nanit](#) is an award-winning camera that uses night vision and machine learning to track your child's movements and then spits out a sleep score in the morning. The number factors in how long it took the child to fall asleep, how many times the parent came in, and how deep the sleep was.

When I told a friend with five children about it, she snorted.

"As if I need data to know how well my children sleep," she replied. "Either I feel like hell in the morning, or I feel like hell warmed over."

But, fresh to the world of man-to-man parenting, and coming to dread a bedtime when I had to nurse one baby while the other threw Scarface-level tantrums in her room, I decided to do a solid for my family, and got in touch with Nanit HQ.

"Putting a child to sleep is one of the first problems you're dealing with as a new parent. The Nanit helps you formalize a strategy," Assaf Glazer, Nanit's founder and former CEO, tells me when we meet at the midtown WeWork where he used to house part of the company.

Glazer – bald, clean-shaven, formerly of the Israel Defense Forces – completed his PhD at the Technion in Haifa, specializing in machine learning and computer vision, and later worked on solutions for missile defense systems. When he became a parent, he found himself working late at night, checking in on his son Udi, and wondering something only a former Israeli air force pilot would ever wonder: *can I apply process control to a baby?*

He knew that if the answer turned out to be yes, he had an audience. On average, parents lose 44 days of sleep during the first year of a baby's life.

The camera Glazer developed uses smart sensors to transmit sound and motion notifications to your phone and, by tracking sleep patterns over time – specifically with your child, but also by bundling the data of thousands of babies and millions of nights of sleep – it offers sleep tips to groggy parents. (The company has since gone on to add other products, including Smart

Sheets, which track a baby's growth, and pajamas and other sleepwear that help the camera better read your child's nighttime movements.)

If you're the kind of parent who simply wants to see how long their child slept the previous night, Glazer tells me, fine. But if you prefer charts and graphs about nap habits over time that rival the metrical intricacies of a spaceship launch, the Nanit can give you that, too. For the right clientele, it occurs to me, marketing this product is the equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel: your audience is sleep-addled and susceptible.

Imagine a child, Glazer tells me, who has just thrown his pacifier out of the crib for the 14th time and is wailing. If you know that it'll take him only two more minutes of crying to put himself back to bed, but you'll prolong that by 20 minutes if you go in to fetch the pacifier, won't you stay outside a little longer?

I don't have to imagine: when Ella was younger, my husband and I would often find ourselves in the wee hours inching around her floor on our stomachs like worms, hunting for various glow-in-the-dark pacifiers she'd thrown out of her crib as she stood, pouting, a mini overlord of a glowing kingdom.

In many ways, Glazer's pitch is compelling. But I keep stumbling on the company's messaging.

"Rest Easy, Your Crib is Covered," reads the website's homepage. The implication is that parents will only be able to fall asleep themselves once they know that a hi-tech camera is monitoring their child's every move.

Why? Sids, or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, which causes unexplained death in seemingly healthy children less than a year old. It kills about 1,300 children in the US each year, and though my pediatrician assures me that its risk plummets if you breastfeed, put babies on their backs, and don't smoke, it's still a panic-inducing acronym. Glazer, I figure, must viscerally understand this.

Way down in the website's fine print, I find a disclaimer:

Nanit is not a medical device. Nanit is a connected product designed and intended to continuously learn from the data it collects to help you understand your baby's sleep patterns. It is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any disease or other condition, including but not limited to, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (Sids). False positive or false negative readings about your baby's breathing patterns are a potential risk of Nanit. Nanit should not substitute for the care and oversight of an adult or consultation with medical professionals.

But it's buried below testimonials, product descriptions and links to the company's Pinterest page, literally the last possible thing you can read, in the teensiest type the website displays.

"They are very clever in how they advertise," Dr Rachel Moon tells me about baby sleep tech devices, when I reach her at the University of Virginia, where she is the division head of general pediatrics. She also serves on the AAP's task force on Sids and has been a practicing pediatrician for more than 30 years. "They never say that this will prevent Sids, but they come pretty close."

A friend's baby was born prematurely, and spent the first few months of her life being intensely monitored in the NICU. Various sleep devices like these understandably calmed my friend's anxiety after she took her daughter home from the hospital and suddenly found herself alone with a child who, mere days before, had a team of professionals checking up on her hourly.

But for the vast majority of babies, this level of tracking is wildly unnecessary, my pediatrician assures me. A doctor wouldn't release a child from the hospital if he or she needed it. On top of that, Moon tells me, researchers have sent hospital-grade monitors home with high-risk children and the studies show they did nothing to prevent Sids. Why would these newfangled, nonmedical versions?

"They get right up to the line so they don't have to be regulated by the FDA, which I think is irresponsible," Moon continues. "The vast majority of parents believe the FDA is regulating all these products. We know that's not

true. It gives you this false sense of complacency – *Oh, since I have this device on, it gives me permission to do what I know I'm not supposed to do.*”

So, you know your baby should be on a hard, firm mattress in a crib, but you want to cuddle at night? As long as the device is on, the reasoning might go, I can snuggle away. “They use one behavior to compensate for another behavior, which is potentially magnified with technology,” says Moon.

After my conversation with Moon, I slowly started to internalize that much of this data gathering serves more to bolster parental anxiety than to guarantee a desired outcome for the child. But however much I wanted to ignore the influx of information, sleep related or otherwise, I found it exceedingly difficult to look away.

And I wanted to know why: why couldn’t I just put my phone away, internalize all the research I’d done about the futility of monitoring weight gained, hours slept, inches grown?

I was somewhat reassured when I learned this impulse – to ingest data and process it – lives deep within our fish brains, embedded there after generations and generations of evolution.

“We are the only species that has this biological imperative built in to the degree we do,” Daniel J Levitin, professor emeritus of psychology and neuroscience at McGill University, tells me.

As Levitin explains, when we left the cover of trees as primates and went out onto the savannah, we became prey. In order to survive, our brain evolved to acquire and process information about the environment, other primates and that lion over there, behind the rock. Those of us with good information-gathering skills were the ones who didn’t just sit there in the wide open, twiddling our opposable thumbs and waiting for said lion to come over and turn us into a mid-morning snack.

Each new hit of information we got, back then, triggered a release of dopamine – and the same is true today, except that release comes after you take a hit of ecstasy, or get an iPhone notification.

The problem is that, in the last five years alone, we've created more information as a species than in all of human history before it. "5,000 years ago, you'd learn about where the new fruit tree was and that was the big event of the week," Levitin tells me. As for processing this information overload? "There's evolutionary lag," he continues, "and it takes about 10,000 years for our brains to catch up."

In the modern era, with so much information bombarding us, our "attentional filter" essentially becomes clogged and stops working properly.

But even if I were able to process all the data, I wonder, to what end? My doctor has assured me that tracking, after a certain point and in most cases, is medically unnecessary. As to whatever part of me might hope to use this data to program my child to behave in a certain way – to sleep at a certain time, to gain a certain amount of weight – well, any more seasoned parent will easily tell me: you can control a child as much as you can force her to poop on command. So shouldn't I save my money, and free up my attentional filter in the process?

Charlotte started sleeping through the night on her own by four months – no devices, no cry-it-out, she just did it. I have no idea why. Perhaps it's because I'd become a different kind of parent, or she's just wired a certain way. But I know, for certain, it had nothing to do with any new-fangled hi-tech sleep tracker.

I'm pregnant with No 3 now. With the baby safely in my uterus, I'm fully prepared to scrub his or her sleep life of technology. But having done this twice before, all I can say is: let's see how smug I am when the baby actually arrives and I'm ready to hop into a smart bassinet myself. If I've learned anything, it's that you can control very little when it comes to parenting – including your own convictions.

This is an edited excerpt from the book [Baby, Unplugged](#), published by HarperOne.

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Games

The 15 greatest games of the 2010s – ranked!



Which would you choose? Photograph: AP

[Keza MacDonald](#) and [Keith Stuart](#)

Tue 7 Sep 2021 05.04 EDT

15. Pokémon Go

(Niantic, 2016)



Pokemon GO Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

For a few months in 2016, you couldn't go anywhere without seeing people swiping at their phones, trying to catch a Psyduck superimposed on their local streets. The news was full of reports of people mobbing hotels or parks to find virtual critters. But [Pokémon Go](#) was more than a fad: it showed us a new way for video games and real life to combine. Friendships, communities and rivalries formed over the years as people went on cross-country or global trips to catch 'em all.

14. Papers Please

(Lucas Pope, 2013)



Papers, Please Photograph: Lucas Pope

Sorting through the passport details of potential immigrants to an eastern European state doesn't sound like the stuff of video-game magic. But this is an extraordinary and gripping game, where the rules of entry are constantly shifting and where lives perpetually hang in the balance. As a commentary on the cruelties meted out to desperate stateless people, it is as heartbreakingly relevant now as it was almost a decade ago.

13. XCOM: Enemy Unknown

(Firaxis, 2012)



XCOM: Enemy Unknown Photograph: 2K Games

You are the general standing between the people of Earth and an alien invasion that's quickly overwhelming the cobbled-together resistance. When you send out your troops, there is a good chance that not all of them will return. XCOM is extraordinary because it's high-stakes, frightening, and consequential: this is a desperate battle for survival, not a power fantasy. It embraces heart-pumping last-minute scrabbles, plans gone awry, devastating failure and unlikely success. And when you do snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, you never forget it.

12. Forza Horizon 4

(Playground [Games](#), 2018)



Forza Horizon 4 Photograph: Microsoft

From idyllic Cotswold villages to stark Scottish highland runs, the fourth title in the open world Horizon series acts like a glorious interactive advert for scenic Britain. With expert use of high-end lighting techniques and an astonishing eye for detail, the world is an absolute pleasure to drive around – and you get to do it in hundreds of beautifully modelled cars. No wonder so many people found it such a comforting lockdown escape route.

11. Spelunky

(Derek Yu, 2012)



Spelunky Photograph: Derek Yu

Ask video game scholars for an example of a “perfect” game, and Spelunky is often mentioned. Delve into Spelunky’s ever-changing and yet just-about conquerable subterranea, and you’re never sure whether you will fall into lava, be dispatched by a bat, accidentally rob a shopkeeper, be impaled on spikes, or make it all the way to hell. A sublime combination of gameplay ideas, daunting environments and random chance combine to make this cave-diving classic feel inexhaustibly fun.

10. Super Mario Galaxy 2

(Nintendo, 2010)



Super Mario Galaxy 2 Photograph: Nintendo

When Nintendo untethered Mario from gravity in 2007's Super Mario Galaxy, we discovered that bending or erasing the laws of physics only created more gleeful and innovative ways for him to run and jump. Super Mario Galaxy 2 is a meteor-shower of brilliant ideas, each level based around a single idea that could support hours of fun, but instead appears only briefly and vanishes while you're still smiling. Perhaps the greatest expression yet of the joy of movement that Mario embodies.

9. Mass Effect 2

(BioWare, 2010)



Mass Effect 2 Photograph: EA

Generally, when aliens die in video games, it's because you've just shot them, and not because – for example – you've accidentally condemned their entire race to extinction with your bad choices, or spent tens of hours befriending them and then walked into what turns out to be a suicide mission. Mass Effect 2 is a blinding science-fiction story about uniting in the face of the impossible, allowing you to create the kinds of relationships with its many characters and themes that film and TV just cannot compete.

8. Red Dead Redemption

(Rockstar, 2010)



Red Dead Redemption Photograph: Rockstar

The story of retired outlaw John Marston riding across a lawless America as the modern era dawns is the stuff of classic western cinema. The fact this huge open game manages to provide all the atmosphere of a John Ford western, with the violence and horror of Sergio Leone and Sam Peckinpah, says much about the narrative and world-building skills of the Rockstar hivemind. Unlike GTA, this is a game with characters you care about in a world that makes emotional sense. It is, in many ways, truly profound.

7. The Last of Us

(Naughty Dog, 2013)



The Last Of Us Photograph: Sony

Brutal, elegiac and uncompromising, *The Last of Us* dragged the emerging “dad game” genre into a stunningly realised post-apocalyptic landscape and then beat the crap out of it. The growing relationship between Joel and Ellie provides the emotional core, but they exist in a world filled with sad stories as well as monsters – and Naughty Dog knows just how to do both. But amid the horror, no one, *no one*, will ever forget the giraffe scene when they see it.

6. **The Witcher 3**

(CD Projekt Red, 2015)



The Witcher 3 Photograph: CD Projekt RED

Geralt of Rivia isn't your typical world-saving fantasy protagonist – he's a grizzled monster-hunter with a low tolerance for bullshit and an ongoing thing for his ex-girlfriend, a powerful witch. And this allows us to see European low-fantasy through different eyes: there's little glory here, not much nobility, and good doesn't automatically triumph. The stories you find in this vast world are never what you'd expect, and neither are the creatures. You'll find plenty of fantasy tropes in The Witcher 3, but they're always turned on their heads.

5. Portal 2

(Valve, 2011)



Portal 2 Photograph: EA

The original Portal was a perfectly realised physics puzzler with a fun side story about a misanthropic AI, a corrupt scientific genius and a slice of cake that didn't exist. The sequel takes those narrative threads and crafts a vast dystopian tale of hubris and nemesis, relishing the concept of Glados as a sociopathic sensei to the imprisoned Chell. Intricate, clever and engrossing, it's also among the funniest games ever made.

4. Grand Theft Auto V

(Rockstar, 2013)



Grand Theft Auto V Photograph: Rockstar

Here is the story of three revolting men in a terrible city filled with cheap death and dead-eyed satire – and yet this game is certainly a masterpiece. Rockstar’s pastiche on fame, Silicon Valley, and bromance action movies shows utter commitment to the cause, with every inch of the landscape feeling alive and authored. And the narrative is only a tiny part of the experience, with the game’s multiplayer component, GTA Online, becoming an anarchic playground that has lasted a decade. No other open world gangster game has ever come close to taking this Godfather down.

3. Minecraft

(Mojang, 2011)



Minecraft Photograph: Mojang

Mojang's creative playground is the closest video games have ever come to combining the spontaneous and improvisational qualities of Lego building and tabletop RPGs. Utterly open to player decisions and desires, it revolutionised the idea of cooperative play, introducing unparalleled depths of creative collaboration. Over the past decade it has become a place to play, to grow up and to be a child again. It made stars of the biggest YouTubers in the world, and it has changed innumerable lives for the better – [including my own.](#)

2. Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

(Nintendo, 2017)



The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild Photograph: Nintendo

The most beautiful Zelda game, and also the least restrictive, Breath of the Wild is bottled freedom, a banquet of tempting horizons. It allows for curiosity, daring and playful creativity; where in previous Zelda games you'd see a target across a chasm and know you'd need a hookshot to get over there, in Breath of the Wild you might freeze a boulder in time, whack it with a hammer a few times to store up some kinetic energy, then cling to it as it flies across the gap. You can start fires, run away from fights, see something that looks a bit like a dragon in the skies and end up chasing it deep into a forest halfway across Hyrule. A game you can live inside for months.

1. Dark Souls

(FromSoftware, 2011)



Dark Souls screenshot, game (2011) Photograph: Bandai Namco

Dark Souls' predecessor, Demon's Souls, challenged every convention of its time when it came to what players needed from a game. Comprehensive tutorials? An easy-to-follow plot? Characters or maps telling you what to do and where to go next? Nah. Just drop them into a dark fantasy full of fascinating, terrifying undead things, leave some weapons around, and let them work it all out. This approach to play, informed far more by old fantasy novels and history's earliest, most challenging games than by the slick blockbusters of the time, gave players a thrillingly rewarding gauntlet to overcome. But then Dark Souls took those ideas and weaved them into a forsaken world so intricate, desolately beautiful and fascinatingly interconnected that it still feels bottomless. This is a game in which every encounter can surprise you, every misstep can lead to an ignominious death, and every scrap of dialogue or discarded ring provides a clue to what happened in this towering kingdom of fetid swamp-towns, crumbling castles and cities abandoned to ghosts. This game would enthral millions and make a cult celebrity out of its creator Hidetaka Miyazaki, the one-time unenthusiastic coder who is now president of FromSoftware. It has proven extraordinarily influential, and yet none of the "Soulslike" games that followed have captured its mystery and exquisitely exciting combat (except perhaps Miyazaki's own gothic horror game, Bloodborne).

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Coronavirus

Vietnam man jailed for five years for spreading coronavirus



Vietnam has jailed a man for breaking quarantine and spreading the virus.
Photograph: Luong Thai Linh/EPA

Reuters

Mon 6 Sep 2021 19.17 EDT

A court in [Vietnam](#) has jailed a man for five years for breaking strict Covid quarantine rules and spreading the virus to others, state media reported.

Le Van Tri, 28, was convicted of “spreading dangerous infectious diseases” at a one-day trial on Monday at the people’s court of the southern province of Ca Mau, the state-run Vietnam News Agency reported.

[Vietnam](#) had been one of the world’s coronavirus success stories, thanks to targeted mass testing, aggressive contact tracing, tight border restrictions and

strict quarantine. But new clusters of infections since late April have tarnished that record.

“Tung travelled back to Ca Mau from Ho Chi Minh City … and breached the 21-day quarantine regulations,” the news agency said. “Tung infected eight people, one of whom died due to the virus after one month of treatment,” it added.

Reuters did not immediately reach the Ca Mau court for comment.

Ca Mau, Vietnam’s southernmost province, has reported only 191 cases and two deaths since the pandemic began, much fewer than the nearly 260,000 cases and 10,685 deaths in the country’s coronavirus hotspot, Ho Chi Minh City.

Vietnam is battling a worsening Covid outbreak that has infected more than 536,000 people and killed 13,385, the vast majority in the past few months.

The country has sentenced two other people to 18-month and two-year suspended jail terms on the same charges.

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[Japan](#)

Third person dies in Japan after taking contaminated Moderna coronavirus vaccine



A third man has died in Japan after taking Moderna's coronavirus vaccine, though no causal link has been found, said authorities. Photograph: Eugene Hoshiko/AP

[Gavin Blair](#) in Tokyo

Tue 7 Sep 2021 21.12 EDT

A third man has died in [Japan](#) after receiving an injection from one of the batches of Moderna vaccines since recalled after contaminants were found in some of them, though authorities say no causal link has yet been found.

The 49-year-old man had his second shot on 11 August and died the following day. His only known health issue was an allergy to buckwheat, the health ministry said on Monday. As with the [previous two deaths](#), the

ministry said it had yet to establish if the latest fatality was linked to the vaccine.

The shot came from one of the three batches that were part of a recall of 1.63m doses of the Moderna vaccine on 26 August, but not from one of the batches found to have fragments of stainless steel in them. The three batches were manufactured in Spain under contract by Moderna.

The company said: “This is a tragic event, and the loss of life is something that we take very seriously. We offer our sincerest condolences to their loved ones.”

Last week Moderna issued a joint statement with local distributor Takeda Pharmaceutical, saying: “The rare presence of stainless steel particles in the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine does not pose an undue risk to patient safety and it does not adversely affect the benefit/risk profile of the product.”

Early last month, two men in their 30s with no underlying health conditions died within days of getting their second dose of the Moderna vaccine.

Contaminants believed to be pieces of rubber fragments from vial stoppers that entered the vaccine liquid due to incorrectly inserted needles were found in Okinawa, Gunma and Kanagawa in late August and early September. No problems were reported among those injected with the contaminated vaccines, which came from different batches to the previously recalled ones.

More than 500,000 people have been injected with vaccines from the three faulty batches, according to the minister in charge of the vaccine programme, Taro Kono.

Most of the vaccines used in Japan are made by Pfizer, though approximately 18 million doses of Moderna had been administered as of 26 August. Nearly 136m coronavirus doses in total have been given in Japan, where 48% of the population is full vaccinated and more than 59% have received at least one shot.

New infections in Tokyo dropped below 1,000 on Monday for the first time since mid-July.

This article was updated on 8 September to make clear that the third death did not occur from contaminated vaccines.

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Theatre

‘The equivalent of shouting fire’: coughing in theatres is new taboo



A BBC proms present has said it will no longer be considered acceptable to cough in theatre audiences due to Covid stigma. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

[Rachel Hall](#)

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Mon 6 Sep 2021 19.01 EDT

Once considered simply a vital bodily function, coughing could be joining the list of unacceptably disruptive behaviours in theatres, along with excessive rustling, talking and using your mobile phone, as people have become more concerned about contagion risk due to [Covid](#).

The change has been welcomed by [BBC Proms](#) host, Petroc Trelawny, who said one unexpected benefit of the pandemic that he has observed is that

people no longer disturb performances in theatres by “coughing unnecessarily”.

In an interview with the [Radio Times](#), Trelawny speculated that the stigma associated with potentially infecting others with Covid could mean that it will no longer be considered acceptable to cough in public, in a change that would be “particularly beneficial to music lovers”.

Trelawny said: “Now you cough in public at your own risk. Even before you realise what you have done, anxious sideways looks will have been exchanged, the seeds of doubt sown. Coughing has become the equivalent of randomly shouting ‘fire’ in a theatre – a gesture guaranteed to provoke fear.”

Trelawny, a classical music presenter who hosts the [BBC Radio 3](#) breakfast show, said he had been alerted to the change in an email from a listener, which made him realise that the “cacophony of coughing” that used to disrupt moments of dramatic pause in classical music productions had disappeared.

He said he has enjoyed the quieter performances so far in this year’s Proms, the televised [BBC classical music festival](#) which started on 30 July and will run until 11 September, as well as on trains and in cafes.

Although he viewed coughing as disruptive to performances, Trelawny said he did not want the public to feel they ought to remain silent. “The sound of a large crowd clapping and cheering has been thrilling and comforting, a deeply reassuring part of a same-but-different Proms season,” he said.

Although theatre audiences are often characterised as stuffy, coughing has historically been considered an unfortunate but unavoidable impulse, and therefore acceptable in public. As theatre critic [James Agate](#) once wryly observed: “Long experience has taught me that in England nobody goes to the theatre unless he or she has bronchitis.”

But Simon Williams, a behavioural scientist at Swansea University who has [researched](#) the new social norms that Covid has introduced, said the pandemic has changed how we understand infectious disease, with coughing now stigmatised as a contagion risk rather than something to be sympathised

with.

“Before, many of us were likely a bit complacent about infection-reducing behaviours. Certainly in the UK none of us wore masks and most of us might have ‘soldiered’ into work with a cough or the sniffles, despite the risk of perhaps spreading the flu or another respiratory disease,” he said.

“Whereas once a sneeze was greeted with a ‘bless you’ or we didn’t think much about another’s cough, now the latter has been seen as a symptom and a symbol of Covid and so it is likely to be met with some concern and anxiety by some for some time yet.”

Williams added that he expects that improved hand hygiene will outlast the pandemic, while surveys show people are prepared to occasionally wear masks in future, for example when they are not feeling well.

He cautioned that although overall Covid anxiety has reduced since the vaccine programme began, his research suggested there is a growing sense of stigma around visible and audible signs of infection, with one participant describing feeling like a “leper” when she coughed while out shopping, despite this being connected to her long history of smoking rather than Covid.

“People would report feeling like others were invading their personal space or would feel anxious when others near them were coughing. People not coughing into their elbows were seen to be not just rude but even a potential risk or threat to others’ health,” Williams said.

“We might anticipate more instances of anxiety or even conflict for some – as people try to work out the new balance between protecting personal space within public shared spaces, like shops, trains or theatres.”

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Coronavirus**](#)

Giving booster shots before the world is vaccinated won't keep the UK safe from Covid

[**Charlotte Summers**](#)



A nurse preparing Covid-19 vaccines in Antananarivo, Madagascar, May 2021. Photograph: Rijasolo/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 7 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Should Britain approve booster doses for broad swathes of the population? The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is deciding this week, and has already advised a third dose be offered to over-11s who had severe immunosuppression at the time of their first or second jab (including people with conditions such as leukaemia). Approving a mass booster programme would bring Britain in line with countries such as the

United States and Israel that are already offering third doses to their vaccinated populations.

These plans are based on concerns that the protection offered by vaccines may wane over time. Indeed, data from a [widely cited study](#) in Israel has shown that the efficacy against severe disease of the Pfizer vaccine decreased from 91% in individuals aged 60 or over who were vaccinated four months prior to the study, to 86% in those vaccinated six months before the study. For 40- to 59-year-olds, the protection against severe disease dropped from 98% to 94%.

But while these results suggest a decline in vaccine effectiveness over time, they also show that vaccines remain highly effective against severe disease six months after two doses. In a study [of more than 7 million people](#) in the UK [across 718 English general practices](#), antibody levels in the blood of people with immunosuppression gradually reduced after receiving a Covid-19 vaccination. Despite this, vaccines remained effective at preventing clinical disease – suggesting that antibody levels may not tell the whole story of how our immune systems respond.

Why is this? Primarily, we can't yet be certain about the best way to measure the protection offered by Covid-19 vaccines. The markers of protection against getting infected with the virus that causes Covid, becoming ill with it, or becoming severely ill (resulting in hospitalisation or death), may all be different. Although antibody levels in the blood provide us with an indication of how that person's immune system responded to the vaccine, they don't necessarily tell us how an individual's immune system will respond when encountering the virus.

The immune system is a complex attack system that behaves differently in different people. Measuring antibody levels to tell us how effective a vaccine will be at protecting someone from severe Covid may turn out to be the equivalent of assessing the strength of an army based on its number of tanks, rather than the full might of its forces and armoury.

With this uncertainty in mind, the World Health Organization (WHO) has called for a moratorium on Covid-19 booster shots. It has pointed out that there isn't enough [compelling science](#) to approve boosters yet. Mike Ryan,

director of the WHO's health emergency programme, has likened plans for administering boosters to handing out "extra lifejackets to people who already have lifejackets, while ... leaving other people to drown without a single lifejacket".

By the end of August 2021, [57% of adults](#) in high-income countries had received at least one dose of a Covid vaccine. In the UK, this figure exceeds [88%](#). Yet in low-income countries, just 2% of adults had received one or more doses (in Benin, Madagascar, Turkmenistan and Tanzania, among other countries, [less than one in 100](#) people had received a single dose). I'm an intensive-care physician; because of this, I received my first Covid vaccine dose in early January 2021, followed by a second dose in late March. Months later, healthcare workers in other regions of the world are still having to care for patients who have Covid, risking their lives without vital vaccine protection.

Vaccine supplies are not currently limitless, and ensuring the infrastructure is in place to deliver them across the world requires careful planning. Countries need to know in advance when supplies will be arriving so they can plan for where and how to deliver doses. It's not helpful for high-income countries to donate vaccine supplies at short notice that they cannot use due to short expiry dates. There needs to be proper global cooperation and coordination to ensure no doses are wasted.

That so many people still lack access to vaccines because of where they live is a failure of international leadership. This unequal situation is in nobody's interests: high levels of transmission make it more likely that new variants may emerge that evade the protection of our current vaccines. To ensure everyone is safe – including people in high-income countries – vaccinating as many people as quickly as possible is a far better strategy than vaccinating a small group of people repeatedly.

Not doing everything possible to ensure treatments, vaccines, tests and oxygen are available to everyone who needs them is a choice. Britain will be choosing to ignore the needs of those in poorer countries if it starts administering booster shots across wide swathes of the population. All choices have consequences, and the consequences of this choice will be felt

by all of us, wherever we live. There should be no room for nationalism during a global public health crisis.

- Dr Charlotte Summers is a lecturer in intensive care medicine at the University of Cambridge
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OpinionCoronavirus

As a virologist I'm shocked my work has been hijacked by anti-vaxxers

David LV Bauer



‘The videos seemed to be mutating and spreading, with new, more virulent variants catching on online.’ Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

Tue 7 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

As a virologist, I’ve spent the past year or more studying the novel coronavirus that has upended all our lives. Communicating our work to the public and speaking to the media is an important part of my job, and I’ve always tried to be clear and accurate about the science: I believe the available vaccines against Covid-19 are safe, and they are our best route back to a more normal way of living.

I’ve been concerned about the anti-vaccination movement since before the pandemic. But I never imagined that my own work could actually be part of

their misinformation arsenal. So I was shocked to discover that a recent TV interview I did for ITV London News had been seized on by anti-vax and conspiracy activists and now has thousands of likes, shares and retweets across social media.

The [original interview](#) was about [our research](#) on the Pfizer vaccine, which found that the antibody levels it generates are not as good at neutralising the Delta variant than against the original Wuhan strain – a simple update on likely vaccine protection. But the widely shared versions of the video were often edited, or taken out of context, to make me out to be some sort of supervillain, or the unlikely hero of the anti-vax world.

In some videos, I'm shown playing the part of the brave dissenter inside the establishment, blowing the whistle against some imagined harm of the vaccine. In another, I'm introduced as the head of the “UK bioweapons programme”, being caught admitting that the Covid vaccine could somehow destroy your immune system.

Like the virus itself, the videos seemed to be mutating and spreading, with new, more virulent variants catching on online. One of the most widely viewed videos created a convoluted and conspiratorial narrative involving vaccines, alien DNA and abortion which was repeated over and over – and featured the same clip of me replayed over and over at various points.

Judging by the messages coming into my inbox, there are a lot of people taken in by this. I get tens of notifications a week (even three months later) from people still citing these videos as proof that vaccines don't work.

And I still get direct inquiries from people genuinely worried about the impact of these videos. I've heard from a nurse for a prison in New Zealand, wanting to reassure prisoners under her care who were fearful of being vaccinated. I've heard from a woman in the United States, fearful for her clinically vulnerable brother, who she said was taken in by online conspiracies. I've heard from a couple in Canada trying to decide whether to accept the vaccine, who wanted to understand exactly where these videos adhered to the truth, and where they had departed from it.

When I've replied to them, the response has always been grateful. I hope I've been able to persuade people to get the protection vaccination offers. But the hundreds of thousands of social media accounts sharing this distortion of my words are a different matter, forcing me to reflect on what makes anti-vaxxers share their misguided views so energetically.

A clever aspect of the videos is that they start with a trace of plausibility before veering into the implausible. In our research we did find that antibodies generated by the vaccine neutralise the Delta variant six times less well than they did the original strain in the lab.

But it's far better to have some antibodies than none at all – a fact borne out by the vaccine's continued success in preventing severe disease and death worldwide. And the idea that the vaccines destroy your immune system is just plain false: antibody levels in vaccinated people are still far higher than they are in unvaccinated people. Obscuring this fact has obvious tragic consequences, as [unvaccinated patients](#) continue to fill intensive care units around the world.

Another part of the appeal of such misinformation is that it restores a sense of agency to people who lack a sense of control over their own lives. It makes people feel part of a “tribe” of those in the know. Every time Twitter or YouTube blocked one of these videos, people commenting on it took it as proof that its misinformation was therefore true.

And the fact that these claims are obviously ridiculous and widely condemned by doctors and scientists serves its own purpose. The people most involved in spreading misinformation can claim they and their followers are being oppressed – further isolating those who are susceptible, and creating an online echo chamber.

It may seem contradictory for a scientist to discourage scepticism: after all, the first thing I teach my students is to be critical of data and to think of alternative interpretations. But in this case, it is scepticism built on a foundation of deep theoretical and practical knowledge and an understanding of the field in which they work – something that vaccine critics lack, no matter how knowledgeable they may be in other areas.

It would be as if I, as a scientist, refused to drive a car fitted with airbags because I heard they had explosives in them, no matter how many times qualified engineers explained to me that airbags would save my life.

Everyone, no matter how clever, relies on the judgment of experts to shape parts of their worldview and make decisions. Even the people spreading dangerous conspiracies know this, and that is why I ended up in the anti-vax vortex: I was used as an expert voice against vaccines.

On Twitter, one person exasperatedly argued against people sharing one of the conspiracy videos in which I am the unwilling star, saying: “Come on people, can’t you see he’s a nobody?” Without trivialising the accomplishments of myself and my colleagues, that person is correct. I haven’t invented a vaccine. I don’t have a role in government and I don’t run a hospital.

But I do have an official title as a scientist, and a large body of scientific work proving my relevant expertise. And the anti-vax movement has almost no one with those things willing to take their side – the overwhelming majority of scientists correctly believe in vaccines.

So when I appeared in a video that could be easily misrepresented, they jumped at the chance to “recruit” me. So if you were somehow swayed by the claims that I appeared to make in those videos, please take the advice I actually believe: the vaccine will protect you from Covid. Get vaccinated.

- David LV Bauer is a virologist and head of the RNA virus replication laboratory at the Francis Crick Institute in London
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[Opinion](#)[Social care](#)

The Tories are in revolt about social care – and Boris Johnson’s ‘clear plan’ won’t work

[Polly Toynbee](#)





Social care workers and campaigners demonstrate for improved pay and conditions in the sector, London, September 2021. Photograph: WIktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 6 Sep 2021 11.40 EDT

The spectacle of the Tory party in a frothing fury is a stirring one. Ministers brief freely – Jacob Rees-Mogg’s head high above the parapet – while every WhatsApp groupuscule of Conservative MPs rampages against [raising national insurance](#) to fund social care and the NHS.

It’s hard to find a loyal voice, beyond the ministerial payroll dutifully sent into TV studios to be knocked about. The angries storm at the prospect of breaking manifesto promises – not to raise the three main taxes and not to break the pension triple lock (though their hunting horns were strangely muted over the broken promise not to cut foreign aid).

The Tory press puts on a splendid firework display. “The last thing we need is a new wave of taxes to squash enterprise,” flames the [Mail on Sunday](#); “Tories at war over ‘idiotic’ tax increase,” splashes the [Sunday Telegraph](#). Quotes garnered elsewhere are a rollicking good read, including Marcus Fysh, MP for Yeovil: “[Ministers who want to be socialists shouldn’t be ministers any more](#).” An [unnamed MP](#) says: “What they are proposing is a

one-size-fits-all social gulag ... a horrific dystopian future.” Anger at the net zero climate target gets thrown into the mix too.

On the other wing, a wiser cacophony – from the likes of John Major, Damian Green, Jeremy Hunt and Philip Hammond – calls out the gross injustice of raising this levy via national insurance. The lowest-paid workers start paying on earnings of just £10,000, while 66-year-olds pay nothing, with zero levied on dividends or rents.

As the BBC’s Andrew Marr put it brusquely to [multimillionaire minister Nadhim Zahawi](#), a worker renting in Hartlepool will pay hundreds more, while someone, “let’s call him Nadhim Zahawi, who has millions and millions of pounds in rental property in central London, will pay nothing at all, diddly squat. Now that is not fair.” Marr poked him with the generational injustice too: “A 25-year-old on £20,000 will pay £104, but a 66-year-old earning £55,000 pays absolutely nothing.”

Expect these objections to be reprised in every media report. The government will pretend to correct generational injustice with a one-year break in the triple lock pension [“saving” £5bn](#): that’s not a saving but correcting a statistical freak when an earnings plunge followed by a bounceback caused an [apparent 8.8% wage rise](#). Matching that would gift pensioners a super-bonanza. But here’s a grisly saving hidden in the Office for Budget Responsibility [budget report](#): £1.5bn will be [recouped in state pensions](#) from the thousands of Covid dead.

Boris Johnson will plough on: most of his MPs and all his cabinet will kowtow. Why? Because [YouGov](#) finds two-thirds of voters are willing to pay extra national insurance to fund the NHS and social care. For that, the government relies on public ignorance. People prefer paying national insurance in the false belief it pays for their NHS and pensions, though it’s actually just another, less fair, income tax – a relic chancellors like for that convenient illusion.

Even so, social care is a potential political landmine. Many voters [don’t realise](#) it isn’t free: when they hear of having to pay a cap of, say, £80,000 before the state takes over, some are outraged, not appreciating this protects the rest of their inheritance. That’s what tripped up Labour health secretary

Andy Burnham's excellent plan in 2009, damned as a “[death tax](#)”. That's what sunk Theresa May in her 2017 manifesto, damned as a “[dementia tax](#)”.

Here's Johnson's greatest risk. Unless he reforms national insurance to levy it on the retired and on unearned incomes, this unfairness will break through the political sound barrier. He can forget “levelling up” – a slogan that would finally be killed stone dead by this, alongside the [f20 universal credit cut](#) in the coming weeks just when thousands of young workers crash out of furlough into unemployment.

Labour's Keir Starmer [rejects using national insurance](#) for this levy, while Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, tells me: “The broadest shoulders should pay the most. Any tax rises must be fair across generations *and* all forms of income, including assets.” But when asked “So what would Labour do?” the party spokespeople resist, waiting to lay out their tax reforms at the election. In the white heat of this row, there's no time for such caution. In the Commons they need a crisp reply right now: get this right and they can land blow after blow in the coming autumn of spending austerity.

In one way, Downing Street relishes the crescendo of a Tory party row: voters like leaders resisting their own party's ideologues. Besides, Johnson needs a phoney “big spender” disguise for the cuts ahead.

But this care crisis won't vanish from the news. Those doing the caring see no sign of the “clear plan” Johnson claimed to have on his first day in No 10: “We will fix the crisis in social care once and for all,” he said then. The £10bn likely to be raised for care falls short of the [£12.5bn investment needed](#) just to return to 2010's meagre funding. Most will go on [relieving costs](#) for property-owning families in the south-east of England – with far less for improving the quality of care or abysmal pay for staff, who are leaving in droves.

What's more, the “plan” is to give the NHS the first tranche for reducing waiting lists, as that is the public's top concern. In both services there's a raucous laugh at the fantasy that when those lists are gone (really?) any remaining cash will transfer from the NHS to care. There will be nothing left from an NHS degraded after a decade of underfunding greater than any it's ever faced.

Glumly waiting for funds, Mike Padgham, head of St Cecilia's four care homes in Scarborough, and who also represents 250 small care home owners in the north of England, asks: "Where's the plan?"

"Raising money is welcome," he says, "but who does it go to? Is it for councils and is it ringfenced?" He needs to raise his carers' pay to NHS rates, as once promised, but sees no sign of raised fees to cover that. "I'm losing staff." And like his members he has 10% vacancies. The "no jab, no job" rule will see more go: when I visited recently he had six vaccine refusers. He's only persuaded two, "but I can't let four go, with winter coming on". He's written to residents' relatives to ask them to volunteer to help, "it's that desperate". As this levy is already promised many times over, there will be vocal disappointments.

Standing back, how odd that [Boris Johnson](#), of all people, nailed his reputation to the unlikely cause of social care. If he does use national insurance, such an unjust tax may yet stir outrage even in a country usually undertroubled by inequality. He may yet regret entering this graveyard of other leaders.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

[Opinion](#)[Data protection](#)

The Taliban are showing us the dangers of personal data falling into the wrong hands

Emrys Schoemaker



Afghan election commission workers transfer data from biometric devices to the main server in Kabul, October 2019. Photograph: Mohammad Ismail/Reuters

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[About this content](#)

Tue 7 Sep 2021 02.30 EDT

The [Taliban](#) have openly talked about using US-made digital identity technology to hunt down Afghans who have worked with the international coalition – posing a huge threat to everyone recorded in the system. In addition, the extremists now also have access to – and control over – the digital identification systems and technologies built through international aid support.

These include the e-Tazkira, a biometric identity card used by Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority, which includes fingerprints, iris scans and a photograph, as well as voter registration databases. It also includes the Afghan personnel and pay system, used by the interior and defence ministries to pay the army and police.

For Afghans, and for the wider community working on digital identification for development, this means that the Taliban have sensitive personal information that they have said will be used to target those they consider enemies or threats. While some Afghans are frantically trying to erase any trace of digital activity on official databases, user deletion is not an option.

This is yet another wake-up call illustrating the risks that new digital technologies can pose when they end up in the wrong hands, and for the development community. It reminds those working on digital identity and digital public infrastructure for development, that the benefits of ID systems – enshrined in the [sustainable development goal 16.9](#), right to legal identity – should never be at the expense of individual safety.

Like all technologies, digital identity systems are neither good nor bad, but never neutral

Until now, the international development community's efforts have focused on adoption and inclusion – the fastest and cheapest ways to make people visible to the state in order to manage access to rights and entitlements. The benefits of inclusion in digital ID are extensive – whether that allows access to healthcare and social services, to enrol a child in school, to open a bank account or obtain a mobile phone, to get a job, vote or register a business.

But protection needs to be a bigger priority. Like all technologies, digital identity systems are neither good nor bad, but never neutral, and they amplify the power of those that control them. No technology is going to change actors such as the Taliban's efforts to target those they wish to find. But the deployment of digital identity systems needs to be smarter about understanding the political interests and risks that shape the contexts in which those systems are used.

Even if this is addressed, identification systems are still going to be rolled out in places where political risks are obvious – just like they have been in Afghanistan. We need to focus on emerging approaches to data management, and mitigating the misuse of these technologies.

For example, we must embrace the “data minimisation principle” – the idea that only necessary personal data should be collected and retained. We also need an approach that minimises centralised data collection, and gives more control to individuals. Countries such as Germany, Spain and the Netherlands are [developing digital wallet-based ID systems](#) – that decentralise data storage and control – while the [EU's Covid vaccine passport](#) uses a similar model.

While there are isolated examples of efforts to develop enhanced approaches to these systems and deliver innovation to better protect us, there is no established, independent body of knowledge. There is a wealth of expertise in various governments, companies and associations around the world, in niche newsletter groups, and online publications that could contribute to thinking on this and to developing policy positions. But a gap exists – a need for independent, critical research and advisory services on this important topic. And particularly so for development donors, to support decision-making and investment that can help advance the benefits of digital identification while ensuring that the risks are mitigated.

- Emrys Schoemaker is a researcher and strategist at Caribou Digital, where his work focuses on the interaction between digital technologies and social, political and economic change.
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2021.09.07 - Around the world

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[Brazil](#)

Thousands gather for pro-Bolsonaro rallies as critics fear for democracy



Jair Bolsonaro reacts to supporters outside the presidential palace in Brasília on Monday. Photograph: Eraldo Peres/AP

[Tom Phillips](#) in Brasília

Mon 6 Sep 2021 14.37 EDT

Thousands of diehard [Jair Bolsonaro](#) followers have converged on Brazil's political and economic capitals hoping to stage a colossal show of support for their beleaguered president amid mounting fears over the future of Brazilian democracy and of possible skirmishes with the government's opponents.

The rightwing nationalist, who recently warned Brazil [could face a political “rupture”](#), is expected to address packed independence day rallies in Brasília

and São Paulo on Tuesday in what observers say is an increasingly weak politician's attempt to project strength.

Bolsonaro supporters broke through police roadblocks on Monday night that had sought to prevent access to the capital's central mall.

The Federal District's security secretariat said in a statement that officers had been deployed in an effort to control the situation. Video shared on social media showed trucks progressing while blaring their horns as hundreds of people dressed in the national green-and-yellow colours walked alongside and cheered.

Bolsonaro's approval ratings have plummeted in recent months as corruption allegations have ensnared a succession of allies and relatives and [a congressional inquiry](#) has savaged his government's response to a Covid outbreak that has killed nearly 600,000 Brazilians. Polls suggest almost two-thirds of Brazilians now oppose Bolsonaro's presidency and that the leftwing former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva would beat him in next year's election.

"These are the death throes of a government in agony," Alessandro Molon, a congressman from the leftwing Brazilian Socialist party (PSB), said of Tuesday's planned demonstrations.

But Bolsonaro still enjoys substantial support, particularly among evangelical Christians and in Brazil's agricultural heartlands and deep south. As they poured into Brasília from across the country, on buses, trucks and planes, those disciples said they were determined to champion a leader whose chances of re-election next year look increasingly frail.

"Man, I feel immense happiness at being here because we're here to make our country a better place and get these corrupt folk out," said Orlandino Mendes Valentim, 54, who had driven 700 miles to the capital from the town of Mantena in the south-eastern state of Minas Gerais.

"We thank God that a man like Bolsonaro came along to fight our corner," Valentim said as he strolled through the political centre of Brazil's futurist capital on Monday afternoon, past street vendors selling T-shirts depicting

Bolsonaro wearing army fatigues and with the English slogan: “Make Brazil Great Again.” He added: “We don’t want to turn into some kind of Venezuela or Argentina.”

Valentim’s travelling companion Custódio Marques Junior said he had come to fight for the future of his children and grandchildren and to make Brazil more like the US, where he is a citizen and has lived for many years. He brandished a bright yellow jersey stamped with the words: “Fechados com Bolsonaro.” (We’re with Bolsonaro.)

“Tomorrow is about our freedom. It’s 7 September. ‘Independence or death!’” Marques said, quoting the cry attributed to the then prince regent, Dom Pedro, as he proclaimed Brazilian independence from Portugal in September 1822.

Valentim insisted Tuesday’s rally on Brasília’s esplanade of ministries – the heart of government in Latin America’s largest democracy – would be peaceful. “Bolsonaro voters are people of peace,” he said.

But there are growing fears there could be spasms of violence, as hardcore supporters of Brazil’s pro-gun president hit the streets. Before the demonstrations, one Bolsonarista extremist posted an online video from outside the supreme court in which he urged his president to use “gunpowder” against its “rotten” justices.

There are particular concerns that in Brasília, rightwing radicals could clash with leftist demonstrators or thousands of indigenous activists who have been camped out near congress since last month to protest against [efforts to roll back their land rights](#).

Others fear Bolsonaro may seek to [seize dictatorial powers by staging a self-coup](#) or wonder if 7 September could turn out to be a Brazilian version of the 6 January [assault on the US Capitol](#) by extremist supporters of Bolsonaro’s political inspiration Donald Trump. Addressing a congress of Bolsonaro supporters in Brasília on Saturday, the former US president’s son Donald Trump Jr reportedly urged delegates to resist the imposition of “tyrannical governments”.

Molon, the leftist congressman, said his party had advised members to stay at home to avoid violence that would give Bolsonaro a pretext to send in the army. “Bolsonaro needs chaos. He is the lord of chaos,” said Molon. “Confrontations or conflicts are all he desires so he can summon the armed forces.”



A Bolsonaro supporter outside the presidential palace. His allies say fears he is provoking chaos are overblown. Photograph: Adriano Machado/Reuters

Ruth de Aquino, a columnist for the newspaper O Globo, said she feared the president was deliberately seeking to spark “pandemonium” that would help him cover up Brazil’s bleak economic outlook, a severe energy crisis and his bungling of Covid. “Bolsonaro is trying to distract attention from this chaos by doing the only thing he knows: provoking chaos and upheaval,” she said.

Supporters of Bolsonaro, a 66-year-old former army captain who [won power in 2018](#) as part of an anti-establishment backlash, say such fears are overblown.

“He’s a raging bull who might hurt you at first because he’s wild and you can’t tame wild animals. But he’s a bull we needed to unleash to shake this country up a bit,” said Elves de Sousa, a 41-year-old evangelical pastor who plans to join a pro-Bolsonaro rally in the midwestern city of Sinop.

Sousa said corruption had become so deeply entrenched under past governments that only a radical figure such as Bolsonaro could set things right, despite the fact that Bolsonaro's allies and sons have been implicated in a series of recent corruption scandals. "We needed a madman. With the greatest respect for our president, I think we needed someone like him, someone radical, to change this," Sousa said.

Molon said he had no doubt that Bolsonaro, who has publicly expressed admiration for authoritarians, including the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, harboured desires to do away with the democratic system that brought him to power. "He's never hidden it from anyone."

But the congressman doubted Brazil's president had the support to pull that off this week and believed Tuesday's rallies were more a desperate attempt to project power Bolsonaro no longer enjoyed. "He's doing this because he's cornered. He has realised that the near future holds electoral defeat and jail, for him and his sons," Molon said. "It's the reaction of a cornered animal."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/06/thousands-gather-pro-bolsonaro-rallies-critics-fear-for-democracy>.

Television

Michael K Williams, star of The Wire, dies aged 54



The actor Michael K Williams, who has died at the age of 54. Photograph: Matt Baron/Rex/Shutterstock

[Hannah J Davies](#) and agencies

[@hannahjdavies](#)

Tue 7 Sep 2021 02.22 EDT

The actor Michael K Williams, best known for his role as Omar Little in [The Wire](#), has died at the age of 54.

Confirming his death to the Hollywood Reporter, Williams's representative said that it was "with deep sorrow that the family announces the passing of Emmy-nominated actor [Michael Kenneth Williams](#). They ask for your privacy while grieving this unsurmountable loss."

01:48

From The Wire to Lovecraft Country: Michael K Williams' memorable roles – video

Williams, who is believed to have been found dead at his home in New York, was also known for playing Albert “Chalky” White in the series Boardwalk Empire from 2010 to 2014. He received an Emmy nomination earlier this year for the role of Montrose Freeman in the series Lovecraft Country, and had appeared in films including 12 Years a Slave and Inherent Vice.

As well as Lovecraft Country, Williams was nominated for three further Primetime Emmy nominations for his work on the [HBO](#) series The Night Of, the TV film Bessie and Ava DuVernay’s miniseries When They See Us.

Isiah Whitlock Jr, who played Senator Davis in [The Wire](#), described Williams as “one of the nicest brothers on the planet with the biggest heart. An amazing actor and soul.” Wendell Pierce, who played Detective Bunk Moreland in the series, said: “The depth of my love for this brother can only be matched by the depth of my pain learning of his loss. An immensely talented man with the ability to give voice to the human condition portraying the lives of those whose humanity is seldom elevated until he sings their truth.”

The comedian Travon Free described Williams as a “God damn genius, a black queer icon who challenged the ideas of black masculinity at a time when it wasn’t easy and a truly great dude. A huge loss.” April Reign, the founder of the #oscarssowhite campaign, said that Williams had “a quiet intensity” and had “expanded the view of what a same-gender loving man looked like in the roles he played”.

Born in Flatbush, Brooklyn, to a Bahamian mother and an American father, Williams started his career as a dancer, working with artists such as George Michael, Missy Elliot, Ginuwine, and Madonna. Among his first acting roles was a part in the 1996 film Bullet alongside Tupac Shakur.

“I was angry and I had a lot of energy,” he told the Associated Press in 2018. “It was such an outlet. I was not the best dancer, you know, by far, but I was definitely the most passionate. I always had this energy. You always felt me whether I was in sync or not with the other guys.”

However, it was as Omar Little in the Baltimore-set crime drama The Wire – which aired from 2002 to 2008 – that Williams would come to mainstream acclaim. As the openly gay stickup man, Williams embodied a character who had not been seen on television before, and who garnered the attention of then-presidential hopeful Barack Obama, who said that Little was “not my favourite person” but was his favourite character in the series. He was twice nominated for the NAACP’s Image awards for his role.

In 2015, Williams told the Guardian that he had struggled to adjust to life following the success of The Wire, and had used the role of Omar “as a means of escape. Now I don’t use my job as a way to define me: it’s what I do, not who I am. I have that understanding now.”

Williams also worked on reports for Vice News, [including a special on incarceration in the US](#). He had also been working with a New Jersey charity on a project to smooth the journey for former prison inmates seeking to re-enter society.

Members of the screen industry paid tribute to Williams on social media as news of his death broke.

David Simon, creator of The Wire, said on Twitter that he was “Too gutted right now to say all that ought to be said. Michael was a fine man and a rare talent and on our journey together he always deserved the best words. And today those words won’t come.”

Actor John Cusack said Williams was “an unbelievably talented artist” and that his portrayal of Omar Little was “among the greatest performances TV and film has ever seen”.

Actor Aisha Tyler said: “Michael K Williams was a beautiful, passionate, expansive soul. I felt so lucky to have known him, and we were all so fortunate to have enjoyed his incredible talent. He burned so very bright.”

The actor had recently completed work on films including 892 with John Boyega, and in August it was confirmed that Williams would play Charles “Doc” Broadus, the mentor to George Foreman, in an upcoming biopic of the former heavyweight boxing champion.

Williams is survived by his son, Elijah.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/sep/06/the-wire-star-michael-k-williams-dies-aged-54>

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[China](#)

Alibaba sexual assault case dropped as China police say ‘forcible indecency’ not a crime



An employee had accused a manager at Alibaba of rape. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 7 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Prosecutors in [China](#) have dropped a case against an Alibaba manager accused of sexually assaulting an employee, saying he committed “forcible indecency” but that it did not constitute a crime.

In August a female employee of the e-commerce giant posted a lengthy statement accusing a manager of raping her during a business trip, and claiming that management at the company did not take her complaint

seriously. Alibaba pledged to [cooperate with a police investigation](#), fired the manager, and suspended other employees.

However on Monday evening the People's Procuratorate of Huaiyin District in Jinan City said that after reviewing the case it had decided not to approve the arrest. It said the investigation had determined the man had committed forcible indecency – a term which includes sexual assault – but that it did not constitute a crime, and the investigation was terminated.

He was instead ordered to be detained for 15 days, in accordance with article 44 of the administrative Public Security Management Punishment Law. Article 44 stipulates 15 days detention as the maximum punishment for a person who molests another or intentionally exposes themselves, “with other serious circumstances”.

On Tuesday morning the man's wife reportedly posted on Weibo that he was “released at dawn”.

In a statement, Alibaba said the facts of the case had been “clarified” and the judicial process concluded. It said the incident and process had deeply affected Alibaba and its employees.

“We will use this as a lesson to continuously improve and perfect ourselves. The growth and development of the company will not be smooth sailing. Only by adhering to ideals and beliefs and surpassing temporary bumps can we better move towards the future. We always believe in the power of justice and in goodwill.”

The case had reignited a national debate over China's #MeToo record, which has also seen other high profile cases against prominent men and highlighted the difficulties in women seeking justice.

On Twitter, Human Rights Watch China researcher, Yaqiu Wang, said it was “another case of online [#MeToo](#) furore failing to turn into real-life accountability”.

On Chinese social media, hashtags related to the dropped Alibaba case were viewed tens of millions of times, and drew heated debates. Some comments

attacked the complainant, while others targeted the man's wife for speaking in support of her husband. Much of the response lamented an apparent lack of accountability in China.

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[Austria](#)

NGOs condemn trial in Austria of ‘Ibizagate’ whistleblower



The video that Hessenthaler circulated led to the conviction of Austrian vice-chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache (left). Photograph: Christian Bruna/EPA

*[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent
[@jonhenley](#)*

Tue 7 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

The “excessive” criminal prosecution of a security consultant whose [“Ibizagate” video](#) brought down Austria’s government will deter whistleblowers and risks infringing fundamental press and information freedoms, rights groups have said.

In an open letter, 15 Austrian and international organisations said the trial of Julian Hessenthaler, which is due to start on Wednesday, was based on

“partially constructed accusations used to discredit and apprehend” him.

Austria’s former vice-chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache was [convicted last week](#) on corruption charges relating to the May 2019 scandal, which ended the coalition of his far-right Freedom party (FPÖ) and the People’s party (ÖVP) of the chancellor, Sebastian Kurz.

The affair dates back to a meeting in 2017 in Ibiza between Strache and a woman purporting to be the niece of a Russian oligarch, to whom he promised state contracts in return for help in his election campaign.

The then FPÖ leader also discussed the possibility of the woman buying Austria’s most popular tabloid newspaper, Kronen Zeitung, and steering its editorial line more towards the party’s anti-Islam, anti-immigration platform.

Strache, who was unaware that the meeting was a sting and that he was being filmed, [resigned](#) along with his parliamentary leader, Johann Gudenus, after the German weekly Der Spiegel and the daily Süddeutsche Zeitung published the video on their websites.

The “remarkable” prosecution of Hessenthaler, who was arrested in Germany late last year and extradited to Austria, aims to send “a clear signal” to future whistleblowers, allege the 15 NGOs, which include Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International, the Centre for Investigative Journalism and the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

“Publication of the video, made possible by Julian Hessenthaler, initiated a discussion of great public interest and allowed the public to form an opinion about Strache’s suitability to hold public office,” said Heinz Patzelt, the secretary general of Amnesty International Austria.

A judicial investigation launched after the video was released led to no fewer than 12 separate inquiries into allegations of wrongdoing by Strache and others. Kurz is also under investigation for alleged false statements to a parliamentary committee over the affair. He says he has always answered questions truthfully.



Julian Hessenthaler. Photograph: Austrian police

Thomas Lohninger, the executive director of epicenter.works, an Austrian digital rights NGO which has helped coordinate the campaign, said the video's publication was protected under the freedom of expression laws in Austria and Germany.

He said: "There is a strong sense that Austrian authorities are resorting to other criminal charges, or at least to prosecuting them in an excessive manner, to silence Hessenthaler. Apparently, he is being made an example of to deter potential future informers from expressing their opinion freely."

Multiple European investigation orders were executed against Hessenthaler, allowing extensive physical surveillance, access to bank accounts, home searches, telephone surveillance and the retrieval of passenger name records from airlines.

He also faces charges of falsifying documents relating to the video, as well as drug charges based on conflicting testimony from a convicted dealer who was released from prison after speaking to investigators, while initial investigations into his case were led by a civil servant with close associations to Strache, the NGOs said, citing legal documents and media reporting.

“Whether he committed the document- and drug-related offences he is now charged with must be resolved in a court of law,” Lohninger said. “However, the intensity and resources used to investigate Julian Hessenthaler – who is entitled to the presumption of innocence – are remarkable.”

The signal was clear, Lohninger alleged: “Those who bring too much truth to light will face criminal investigation, if necessary across international borders. This inevitably acts as a deterrent that discourages other whistleblowers from making revelations and can ultimately limit freedom of opinion and the press in Austria.”

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Business live

Business

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[9/11: 20 years later](#)[September 11 2001](#)

America mourns as leaders and families mark 20th anniversary of 9/11 attacks



People mourn at the 9/11 Memorial on the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, in Manhattan. Photograph: Mike Segar/AFP/Getty Images

[David Smith in Washington](#)

[@smithinamerica](#)

Sat 11 Sep 2021 17.04 EDT

Some wept. Some held photos of loved ones At 8.46am, precisely two decades after a passenger plane became a new and deadly weapon here, all fell silent in remembrance.

Families of the victims gathered at the 9/11 memorial plaza in New York on Saturday to mark the 20th anniversary of terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people and helped shape the 21st century. Similar ceremonies played out in [Washington DC](#) and Pennsylvania – the sites of other attacks that day.

The sombre ceremony in downtown Manhattan played out in bright sunshine that was eerily reminiscent of 11 September 2001 was attended by [Joe Biden](#) and former presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama along with victims' families and first responders. Many wore face masks because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden had hoped that the milestone anniversary could provide a much-needed moment of national unity after ending the war in Afghanistan, launched to root out al-Qaida, which carried out the attacks. But anger is still raw over the the chaotic withdrawal and return to power of the Taliban.



The Clintons, Obamas and Bidens are joined by Michael Bloomberg and his partner, Diana Taylor; Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the House; and Chuck Schumer, the Senate majority leader, in New York. Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/AP

The 9/11 memorial plaza at the former World Trade Center site includes cascading water in the footprints of the twin towers. Mourners placed flowers on the names of the dead inscribed in bronze.

The commemoration began with a tolling bell and a moment of silence. Mike Low, whose daughter was a flight attendant on the airliner that struck the north tower at 8.46am, described an “unbearable sorrow and disbelief” experienced by his family over the past two decades.

“As we recite the names of those we lost my memory goes back to that terrible day when it felt like an evil spectre had descended on our world, but it was also a time when many people acted above and beyond the ordinary,” he said.

Relatives then began to read aloud the names of 2,977 victims, an annual ritual that lasts four hours. Rock star Bruce Springsteen, wearing dark suit and black tie, played guitar and performed the song I’ll See You in My Dreams.



A woman places flowers as she visits the 9/11 Memorial on the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks in Manhattan, New York City.
Photograph: Mike Segar/Reuters



Julia Melendez holds a photo of her husband Antonio, who died working at Windows on the World restaurant during the attack. Photograph: Getty Images

Two decades on, images from 11 September 2001 are vividly imprinted [in the memory](#) of some – everyone can remember where they were – but now represent a historical event for an estimated quarter of the US population born after the atrocity.

The national unity in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 now seems elusive in an America where insurrectionists stormed the US Capitol on 6 January and domestic terrorism is deemed a bigger threat than attacks from overseas.

But 20 years ago, in a crystalline blue sky, al-Qaida terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners and turned them into guided missiles, crashing two into the World Trade Center, a symbol of America's financial might in downtown Manhattan.

People from all over the world were killed in the initial explosions, jumping to their deaths or being pulverized by the collapsing twin towers, an astounding spectacle that horrified audiences on live television.

The hijackers rammed another plane into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the US military near Washington, tearing a hole in its side. A fourth plane – possibly heading towards the US Capitol – crashed into a field in Shanksville, [Pennsylvania](#), after its passengers heroically fought back.

A total of 2,977 people were killed – 2,753 of them at what became known as “Ground Zero” in New York – a bigger toll than the [“day of infamy”](#) at Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Biden and the first lady, Jill Biden, attended solemn ceremonies at all three sites where hijacked planes crashed.

The president did not deliver remarks at any of the locations but he released a video on Friday to express his condolences to the loved ones of the victims and highlight the national unity that followed – a diminishing asset in today's hyper-partisan atmosphere.

He said: “It's so hard. Whether it's the first year or the 20th, children have grown up without parents and parents have suffered without children ... We

also saw something all too rare: a true sense of national unity.”



A man with his daughter on his shoulders looks on at the north reflecting pool of the 9/11 Memorial in Manhattan. Photograph: Mike Segar/Reuters



Attendees gather at the ceremony in New York. Photograph: Erik Pendzich/REX/Shutterstock

The day required Biden to pivot from commander-in-chief to consoler-in-chief. He said in the video: “No matter how much time has passed, these

commemorations bring everything painfully back, as if you just got the news a few seconds ago. And so on this day, Jill and I hold you close in our hearts and send you our love.”

But Biden is still facing congressional investigations into the chaotic departure of US forces from Kabul, less than two weeks ago, that ended America’s longest war. The Taliban are now back in control of Afghanistan, just as they were on 9/11, raising fears that the country could once again become a terrorist hub.

His predecessor, Donald Trump, skipped the official commemorations but visited a [New York](#) police station and firehouse, praising responders’ bravery while seeking to exploit the Afghanistan failure to sow further divisions.

Trump said: “It’s a horrible thing that took place, a horrible, horrible thing. It looked like we retreated, it looked like we gave up. Like, they use the word surrender. And we didn’t surrender – our people didn’t surrender and our soldiers sure as hell didn’t surrender.”

During his presidency, Trump brokered a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 that would have seen all US troops out by May 2021. He was due to return to Florida on Saturday evening to provide ringside commentary at a boxing match.

George W Bush, who launched the retaliatory war in Afghanistan in 2001, spoke at a memorial service in Shanksville. At 10.03am, the names of the passengers and crew members, who were all killed, were read out.

In his speech Bush lamented America’s current political turmoil and attacked those who threatened – or carried out – violence at home. “We have seen growing evidence that the dangers to our country can come not only across borders but from violence that gathers within. There’s little cultural overlap between violent extremists abroad and violent extremists at home,” he said.

“But in their disdain for pluralism, in their disregard for human life, in their determination to defile national symbols, they are children of the same foul

spirit and it is our continuing duty to confront them.”

In what was effectively a rebuke to fellow Republican Trump and his brand of nativist-populist politics, the 43rd president continued: “A malign force seems at work in our common life that turns every disagreement into an argument, and every argument into a clash of cultures. So much of our politics has become a naked appeal to anger, fear and resentment. That leaves us worried about our nation and our future together.”

At Shanksville, the Bidens laid a wreath of red and white roses at the memorial and walked the length of a wall where names of victims are etched and into a field, then towards a boulder that marks where United 93 crashed.



Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Lloyd Austin and others attend a wreath-laying ceremony at the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial. Photograph: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

The president also visited a local fire station and spoke with reporters, defending his Afghanistan policy [and commenting](#): “I thought that President Bush made a really good speech today, a genuinely good speech about who we are. The core of who we are is not divided.”

Earlier at Shanksville, Vice-President Kamala Harris struck a similar chord when she toured the memorial and told a gathering: “On the days that

followed [September 11 2001](#), we were all reminded that unity is possible in America. We were reminded, also, that unity is imperative in America. It is essential to our shared prosperity, our national security, and to our standing in the world.”

Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, joined the Bidens for a final wreath-laying ceremony at the Pentagon just after 4pm. With the defense secretary, Lloyd Austin, and Gen Mark Milley, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, they walked together to study dark plaques engraved with the names of the dead.

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[9/11: 20 years later](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

Queen commemorates ‘terrible attacks’ of 9/11 in message to Joe Biden



The Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, lays flowers in the September 11 Memorial Garden in Grosvenor Square, London, to mark the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attack. Photograph: David Parry/PA

[Jedidajah Otte](#)

Sat 11 Sep 2021 04.55 EDT

[The Queen](#) has sent a message to the US president, [Joe Biden](#), to commemorate the 20th anniversary of 9/11, and remembered her visit to Ground Zero, the site of the attack on the World Trade Center.

Her message said: “As we mark the 20th anniversary of the terrible attacks on September 11 2001, my thoughts and prayers – and those of my family and the entire nation – remain with the victims, survivors and families affected, as well as the first responders and rescue workers called to duty.

“My visit to the site of the World Trade Center in 2010 is held fast in my memory. It reminds me that as we honour those from many nations, faiths and backgrounds who lost their lives, we also pay tribute to the resilience and determination of the communities who joined together to rebuild.”

The British prime minister, [Boris Johnson](#), said the 9/11 terrorists had failed to undermine the faith of “free peoples” around the world in open societies, in a video message that is to be played during a memorial event at the Olympic Park in east London on Saturday.

The prime minister, who was born in [New York](#) City, said the threat of terrorism remained but people refused to live their lives in “permanent fear”.

“The fact that we are coming together today – in sorrow but also in faith and resolve – demonstrates the failure of terrorism and the strength of the bonds between us,” Johnson said.

02:54

'9/11 attacks failed to divide us,' says Boris Johnson – video

A total of 2,977 people were killed in the terror attack, including 67 Britons – “each of them a symbol of the eternal friendship between the United Kingdom and the United States,” he said.

The date of 11 September 2001, “became, in President Roosevelt’s words after Pearl Harbor, a ‘date which will live in infamy’”, Johnson added.

“But while the terrorists imposed their burden of grief and suffering, and while the threat persists today, we can now say with the perspective of 20 years that they failed to shake our belief in freedom and democracy. They failed to drive our nations apart, or cause us to abandon our values, or to live in permanent fear,” he said, adding that recent events in Afghanistan had only strengthened people’s belief in freedom and democracy.

The Labour leader, [Keir Starmer](#), who attended a private memorial service in the September 11 Memorial Garden in Grosvenor Square in London on Saturday, said the consequences of the attacks were “still being felt to this day”, adding the tragedy was “still so raw”.

He said: “But as we mark [this anniversary](#) I’m convinced our resolve has never been stronger. We will continue to fight terror and violence by promoting our values of justice and peace.”

The archbishop of Canterbury said on Twitter: “Twenty years after the 9/11 attacks, it’s still hard to articulate the loss that terrible day brought.

“Today we pray for all those affected by terror and violence. May God guide us together towards the peace offered by the crucified and resurrected Christ.”

The London mayor, Sadiq Khan, said the 9/11 terror attacks “changed our world for ever”.

“Today, we remember the innocent people who lost their lives – including the 67 Britons, many of whom were Londoners.

“Our values of freedom, tolerance and respect will always, always prevail. Hate will never win.”

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex changed the website of their Archewell Foundation to show rows of victims’ names.

Relatives who lost loved ones in the attacks attended a special memorial service at the September 11 Memorial Garden in Grosvenor Square in London on Saturday.

The names of those who died were read at the private service, organised by the September 11 UK Families Support Group.

Events have also been held at Windsor Castle and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London.

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[9/11: 20 years later](#)[Afghanistan](#)

How mass killings by US forces after 9/11 boosted support for the Taliban



A US army marksman scopes for ambushes in Panjwai district, Afghanistan on 23 September 2012. Photograph: Tony Karumba/AFP/Getty Images



[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) in Panjwai, Kandahar

Fri 10 Sep 2021 12.08 EDT

The men of Zangabad village, Panjwai district lined up on the eve of 11 September to count and remember their dead, the dozens of relatives who they say were killed at the hands of the foreign forces that first appeared in their midst nearly 20 years ago.

Their cluster of mud houses, fields and pomegranate orchards was the site of perhaps the most notorious massacre of the war, when US SSgt Robert Bales walked out of a nearby base to slaughter local families in cold blood. He killed 16 people, nine of them children.

America's tragedy, thousands of families' terrible losses on that September morning in 2001, would indirectly unravel into similar grief for thousands of other families half a world away.



Afghan villagers pray over the grave of one of the 16 victims killed in a shooting rampage by Robert Bales. Photograph: Allauddin Khan/AP

Afghans who knew little or nothing about the planes flying into towers in New York, and certainly had no link at all to al-Qaida, were caught up in the war that followed, and that claimed their loved ones year after year.

Haji Muhammad Wazir lost almost all his immediate family, apart from his four-year-old son in the early hours of 11 March 2012. It was more than a decade after the twin towers came down, but they were the reason the US military was on his doorstep.

Bales killed his wife, four sons, four daughters and two other relatives. He shot the children in the head then tried to burn their bodies.

“It is very hard for me, I still feel like these things are happening right now,” Wazir told the Guardian, nearly a decade after the almost unimaginable slaughter ripped apart his life. “I am very happy the American forces have finally left [Afghanistan](#), and very grateful to Allah for making this happen. At last I feel safe.”

Those murders were perhaps the most high-profile civilian deaths of the war. But it was not the only time foreign forces killed large numbers of women,

children and non-combatant men, in just this one corner of a single district of Afghanistan.

Five men from Zangabad who spoke to the Guardian said they lost 49 relatives between them in airstrikes and the massacre, bloodshed spanning nearly a decade. These terrible losses, repeated in many parts of Afghanistan, would prove powerful recruiting tools for the [Taliban](#), as they slowly gathered their forces to retake the country.

“I could not go and fight, because I was the only person left from my family to look after my son, but I was supporting them financially and in other ways,” Wazir said of the aftermath of his tragedy.

The Taliban commander for Panjwai district, Faizani Mawlawi Sahab, said each mass killing drove more people into their arms, and the slaughter of 2012 provoked particular grief and horror. “Although some people were supporting us before, after this incident everyone joined or helped us in some way,” he said.



An Afghan arms dealer sells weapons at his shop in Panjwai district, Kandahar, Afghanistan, 7 September 2021. Photograph: EPA

The nearby city of Kandahar was the Taliban's capital when they first ruled Afghanistan, home to their first leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, and

briefly to Osama bin Laden, architect of the attacks on America.

The Taliban's founding members came from the greater Kandahar region, and the fields and orchards of the farming districts surrounding the city became militant strongholds again when they started regrouping to fight the US-led forces.

The group had tried to negotiate a surrender in 2001, which the country's then-president Hamid Karzai was eager to accept. But America's leaders, still caught up in a hunt for Bin Laden that would last a decade, were more interested in vengeance than Afghanistan's future.

“The United States is not inclined to negotiate surrenders,” secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld announced at the time, with a hubris that would be thrown into relief by the lives lost in Afghanistan over the next two decades and the money spent there.

In the event, Mullah Omar and Bin Laden would outlive the administration that Rumsfeld served in, even though President George W Bush was at the start of eight years in office.

US officials were apparently unable to recognise that the Taliban had a constituency of support in Afghanistan, as repulsive as their governing principles were, from their ban on women's education and most work, to their embrace of punishments like flogging and amputation and public executions.

“The insurgency was not inevitable. There was a good chance for peace in 2001. Everyone, including the Taliban accepted they had been defeated. But the US and their Afghan allies persecuted and marginalised those who'd lost the war, not just Taliban but tribal and factional rivals of those who had seized power,” said Kate Clark, co-director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network.

As the foreign mission tried to wrest back control from the Taliban, the valleys filled with bases, and fighting intensified. Because no war spares civilians, the toll began to mount.

Hasti Mohammad, another resident of Zangabad, lost 18 relatives in 2006 when they decided to flee intense fighting during one of the first major western campaigns in the area, Canadian-led Operation Medusa.

The group took shelter under tents in the desert scrub, feeling protected by their isolation in the open expanse, but an airstrike was called in to target them. The Nato mission eventually admitted the attacks killed about 30 civilians, also claiming a similar number of Taliban militants dead.

The same airstrike killed 14 relatives of Sardar Mohammad (no relative). It barely made news in the west. Yet it had become so violent that by the time the Canadians handed over to the Americans in 2011, not long before the massacre, the troops had reportedly nicknamed it “Zangaboom”.

Little over a year later Bales would walk out of his base to slaughter civilians, and, about four years later, Lal Mohammad’s family was ripped apart by an explosion that killed five of his children as they played outside the front of their home.



Canadian army forces take positions during a sweep for Taliban fighters, 14 June 2006 in Panjwai. Photograph: John Moore/Getty Images

The oldest was 12, the youngest only six. He believes the attack was a US airstrike, although the Guardian was not able to independently confirm

details of this attack. There is no comprehensive public database of civilian losses in Afghanistan and it did not appear in news reports.

Soon after his children were killed, Lal Mohammad was detained and sent to the prison at Bagram airbase outside Kabul, where he stayed for six years until the Taliban advance last month allowed a massive jail break. He insists none of the family had been insurgents before the deaths.

“I was not with the Taliban, my family members were not with the Taliban. But once these things happened most of us joined the Taliban. We didn’t have any other option,” he said. “The Americans killed them, so the only way to manage was to join the Taliban.”

The grim stories of recruitment through grief came from both sides. Taliban suicide attacks frequently targeted or killed civilians. In rural areas and on roads, improvised bombs intended for soldiers were too often detonated by people going about their daily lives. There are multiple credible reports of Taliban fighters forcing people to serve as human shields.

Even after Bales’s massacre, there was an [uprising in parts of Panjwai](#) by locals who claimed they were fed up with Taliban slaughter.

The Taliban claim to have learned from the past, offering an amnesty to their former opponents, promising education to girls and even an inclusive government. But their hardline [all-male, all-Taliban new cabinet](#), reports of reprisals, and [harsh crackdown on protests](#) has raised fears that the cycle of violence could soon start up again.

“In place after place, we saw that Afghans were long suffering in the face of such persecution, how they attempted to get corrupt and abusive officials changed, and only very eventually and reluctantly took up arms,” said Clark.

“I fear the same could be again happening. The Taliban, heady with victory may well push the cycle of revenge forward once more, persecuting and marginalising those they have defeated.”

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MI5

MI5 chief: Taliban Afghan victory has boosted extremists



Taliban fighters patrolling the streets of Kabul. During the previous period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the country became a haven for al-Qaida and its leader, Osama bin Laden. Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

[Dan Sabbagh](#) Defence and security editor

Fri 10 Sep 2021 06.58 EDT

MI5's chief said the Taliban's recapture of [Afghanistan](#) had given Islamist extremists "a psychological boost" in an interview where he also said the spy agency had helped foil six "late-stage" terrorist attacks during the pandemic.

Ken McCallum, giving his first interview since last month's fall of Kabul, said Islamist extremists had been "hardened and emboldened" – and would require special vigilance from the domestic spy agency.

Already the majority of current terrorist plots were inspired by external events such as the fall of Afghanistan, McCallum added, and the latest total of six represented an increase of three since March and two since mid-July.

The change of regime in Kabul last month could have a further impact, he said.

“Terrorist threats tend not to change overnight in the sense of, you know, directed plotting or training camps and infrastructure, the sorts of things that al-Qaida enjoyed in Afghanistan at the time of 9/11,” McCallum told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.



Ken McCallum. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

But he added: “Overnight, you can have a psychological boost, a morale boost, to extremists already here, or in other countries.” He said a particular focus for his agency would be monitoring individuals contemplating acts of terrorism following the [Taliban](#) takeover.

“There is no doubt that recent events in Afghanistan will have hardened and emboldened some of those extremists,” McCallum added.

So-called inspired plots, often undertaken by a single person, were “smaller-scale plots which by their nature are harder to detect”, McCallum said. The

“number of plots that we disrupt nowadays are actually higher than the numbers of plots which were coming at us after 9/11” but were of far lower sophistication, he added.

The spy chief also said that 31 “late-stage attack” plots had been disrupted in Great Britain over the last four years, two more than the last total he disclosed, which was in mid-July. Six were halted during the “pandemic period”, an increase of three since an equivalent figure was disclosed in March.

During the previous period of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, in the years running up to 2001, the country became a haven for al-Qaida and its leader, Osama bin Laden. But the group has promised the US – as part of a peace agreement – not to allow international terrorism to regrow in the country.

An affiliate of the Islamic State group known as ISKP operates in Afghanistan and is inimical to the Taliban. But while it claimed responsibility for last month’s bomb attack at Kabul airport that killed nearly 200, intelligence agencies believe it does not have the capability to operate internationally.

McCallum, however, warned that the situation could change. “Even if the Taliban is absolutely in good faith about wanting to prevent terrorism being exported from Afghanistan, that will be a difficult task to accomplish. Afghanistan is not an easy country to govern and within which to ensure perfect security.”

While the British government would, overall, “treat the Taliban in the light of its actions”, the intelligence agencies needed to plan for an increase in the Islamist threat. “In my role, responsible for UK national security and counter-terrorism, we have to plan on the basis that more risk progressively may flow our way,” he said.

Intelligence agencies have been criticised for not predicting the speed at which Kabul would fall to the Taliban, although McCallum, whose agency deals with threats in the UK, was not specifically questioned about the topic. Foreign intelligence assessments are the lead responsibility of its sister agency MI6.

The UK has begun to engage directly with the Taliban, with Boris Johnson dispatching an envoy, Sir Simon Gass, the chair of the joint intelligence committee, [to meet the group's political leadership in Qatar](#). But at the same time key figures have ratcheted up warnings about acting against terrorism.

Overnight, the defence secretary, Ben Wallace, indicated the UK [could be prepared to authorise drone strikes in Afghanistan](#) if the Taliban failed to prevent the growth of international terrorist groups in the country.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/10/mi5-chief-taliban-afghan-victory-has-boosted-extremists>

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Higher education

Awaiting a ‘tsunami of Covid’: UK lecturers fear students’ return



Dr Stephanie Coen of Nottingham University: ‘I’ve been told I can sardine six students into my tiny office and that masks aren’t mandatory.’
Photograph: Fabio de Paola/The Guardian

[Anna Fazackerley](#)

Sat 11 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

Dr Stephanie Coen, assistant professor in health geography at Nottingham University, is eager to get back to teaching in person. But she fears that with students not required to wear masks when classes start in a few weeks, squeezing them like “sardines” into her tiny room for seminars will be unsafe.

“Some of our Covid safety material talks about respecting people’s choices. But this isn’t about personal choice, it is about public health. It is about

caring for each other.”

On Thursday the education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#), reiterated instructions for universities to give students the return to normality they want, with face-to-face teaching this autumn. But academics say the government has not ensured this will be safe, failing to give clear guidance that masks, social distancing and proper ventilation should be compulsory in classrooms.

Last week, two of the government’s scientific advisers warned that freshers’ week events this month could lead to [“very large spikes”](#) in Covid cases. Now branches of the academics’ union are holding emergency meetings to address staff fears.



Naomi Waltham-Smith, Warwick University: ‘Universities are hampered by a lack of firm guidance’

Yesterday the Independent Sage group of scientists published a report recommending that masks should be required in class at university, rather than merely suggested, among a list of [10 safety measures](#).

Coen says she is worried not only about her own health. “I’ve been told I can sardine six students into my tiny office and that masks aren’t mandatory,” she says. “How would you feel as a first-year student in that

situation? Could you ask your professor, or the person sitting next to you, to wear a mask? It puts them in an absolutely unfair position.”

Like most universities, Nottingham is giving students and staff a list of strong recommendations on precautions, including wearing masks and socially distancing in classes. But Coen says unless universities make all these things compulsory, they will not work.

The fears are evidence-based, she says. “Universities are asking people to come back to campus without mandating that basic things are in place to make it safe. It’s not about emotion.”

A spokesperson for the university says 82% of its students have confirmed they have received at least one Covid vaccination, and the university will run its own weekly testing service. “After 18 months of disruption, we know the vast majority are looking forward to getting back to in-person teaching and the full university experience,” she says. “In instances where staff members are vulnerable or have underlying health conditions, they will not be expected to teach in person.”

Vicky Blake, national president of the UCU says in many universities people are teaching or working in rooms with windows that do not open, or open on to corridors. She says members are “shattered and scared”. “Our union reps are working hard on the ground to support members experiencing a sort of dejected fatigue after a year and a half of the government making clear it just doesn’t care about universities.”

The union wants masks and social distancing to be compulsory in class, ventilation to be monitored and for rooms with inadequate ventilation not to be used.

At Exeter University, which is admitting far more students than planned after the [surge in A-level grades](#), a lecturer says: “Everyone is frightened.” The academic, who asked to remain anonymous, says staff are worried about giving seminars in poorly ventilated rooms. “If you are shopping in a supermarket, at least it is a big building with some level of air con. In universities like ours, we are talking about buildings that are half a century old with no ventilation.”

Belinda Zakrzewska, a PhD student at Sussex University, is frightened of contracting long Covid when she resumes teaching. Although her supervisor has been supportive, she says many younger academics will not find it easy to speak out. “The idea that I can’t stop the class because someone isn’t wearing a mask makes me feel really anxious,” she says. “The university is saying this won’t be grounds for asking a student to leave.”

01:10

Williamson says universities must 'stand up' offers to students with in-person teaching – video

Naomi Waltham-Smith, political philosopher and reader at the [University of Warwick](#), says the government has put universities in an “impossible” position. “Most universities are attempting to do as much as they can but they are hampered by a lack of firm guidance from the government on things like mask-wearing,” she says. “The government is asking universities to reduce the risk to the ‘lowest reasonably practicable level’ while making it difficult for them to bring in the mitigations that would reduce that risk.”

At the [University of Ulster](#), the local branch of the University and College Union held an emergency meeting of “furious” academics on Wednesday, to discuss fears over returning to face-to-face teaching with no requirement for social distancing.

A branch spokesperson says: “If you’ve got people jam-packed in classrooms, that is too much of a risk for staff and students. The Delta variant is extremely high here and our members are anxious for themselves and their families. They are also very angry.”

Masks remain mandatory in venues indoors in Northern Ireland, but the union thinks face coverings alone will not be enough. The Northern Ireland executive says workplaces must maintain social distance, but has not made clear whether this applies to universities.

The UCU spokesperson says academics fully understand students have had a “rough ride” and want them to come back into the classroom, but in a phased way to manage numbers. She adds: “People will be in rooms for a prolonged period of time, and this is an aerosol-borne virus.”

Strathclyde University UCU on Wednesday also held an emergency meeting to discuss “unsafe learning and working conditions”. The branch is calling for mandatory masks, adequate ventilation and CO₂ monitors in all classrooms. In a [tweet this week](#) the branch said: “There is a tsunami of Covid about to wash on to our campuses. Students will get sick and miss class, staff will be sick and unable to teach. Some will develop long term disability.”

Exeter University says: “The vast majority of our academics are looking forward to returning to face-to-face teaching but we recognise that some will be concerned and anxious, which is why we have been working with trade unions and public health teams to put in place comprehensive Covid-19 control measures.” The university is offering wellbeing support for staff.

Sussex University, which is offering [prizes of £5,000](#) for double-jabbed students, says: “We are leading the way to ensure we have done everything we can to encourage all students to get vaccinated.” The university is providing staff and students with wristbands and lanyards “to indicate to others that they request physical distancing”.

Ulster University emphasises that it is adhering to the Northern Ireland executive’s guidelines. “We acknowledge that some staff may feel apprehensive and we will continue to work closely with them as we implement a comprehensive range of mitigations,” it says. The [University of Strathclyde](#) says it is “adhering to – and in some cases, going further than – the Scottish government’s baseline measures”.

The Department for Education says: “Higher education providers should continue to conduct risk assessments, in line with the latest government guidance.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/sep/11/awaiting-a-tsunami-of-covid-uk-lecturers-fear-students-return>

Coronavirus

Be prepared for winter Covid wave, Boris Johnson to warn



A sign warning of high Covid case rates in Falmouth, Cornwall. Photograph: Hugh R Hastings/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#), [Rowena Mason](#), [Peter Walker](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Fri 10 Sep 2021 10.12 EDT

England must head into an “uncertain” winter fully prepared for a new wave of the pandemic, [Boris Johnson](#) will warn next week as he unveils a blueprint for to avoid shutting schools and pubs again.

The prime minister’s Covid winter plan for [England](#) will set out “contingency” measures – which could involve the reintroduction of some nationwide restrictions such as social distancing or masks – that would come into force if case numbers and hospitalisations begin to overwhelm the NHS again.

On Tuesday Johnson is expected to announce his plan for avoiding a full lockdown, including the introduction of [Covid boosters](#) and the biggest ever [flu jab campaign](#), to be administered at the same time.

Government sources said they believed the boosters would be recommended only for elderly and vulnerable people in the first stage but stressed the NHS would be ready if advisers approved a wider introduction of third jabs for other age groups.

Johnson will also announce the rollout of [Covid passports](#) to access large, crowded venues such as nightclubs, and the UK's chief medical officers are next week expected to give the green light to vaccinate children aged 12 to 15.

A senior government source said of the winter plan: "We're going to approach it as we have done through the pandemic: be prepared. If cases become a problem and hospitalisations become a problem then we will act."

On Friday, 37,622 new Covid cases were reported, while 1,063 people were admitted to hospital with the virus across the UK and there were 147 coronavirus deaths.

The source added that the prime minister "desperately wants to avoid having to close anything" and the Covid winter plan was designed to avoid the need for another full lockdown.

"There's a great deal of uncertainty about what's going to happen. We need to be prepared, we need to have options ready to go. But we've got confidence in our vaccine programme, we'll have more details on boosters and hopefully kids next week, and we'll make sure we go into the winter fully prepared," they said.

No 10 is hoping the blueprint will appease Tory anti-lockdown rebels, who are already in revolt over the government's plans to extend emergency Covid powers for another six months, with a vote expected later in September.

One senior Whitehall source said Johnson's intervention "will do what we in government will call pitch rolling, trying to tell the public things are kind of

OK but there may come a time between now and winter where we reintroduce certain measures”.

“The PM doesn’t want any measures but we can’t rule it out – if we don’t want another lockdown, we may have to use other options … [which] could be reintroducing social distancing, reintroducing face masks in some circumstances.”

Setting out the government’s thinking on the pandemic, the prime minister is likely to strike a more cautious note than he has done in recent months, warning the public to continue being careful as cases are rising. The hope within Downing Street is that people will take it upon themselves to take extra precautions without the need for formal restrictions.

Johnson’s official spokesman said the country should be ready for the NHS to face a “difficult time” this winter.

The prime minister’s Covid plan for England is expected to coincide with announcements from the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisation (JCVI) on booster jabs and from the UK’s chief medical officers on the vaccination of schoolchildren aged 12-15.

The JCVI is understood to have agreed in principle to an autumn programme of boosters after lengthy discussions on Thursday, at which the panel was shown interim findings of the [Cov-Boost study](#), which examined the efficacy of various vaccines given as a third dose to people who had previously had two AstraZeneca or Pfizer jabs.

The JCVI has already [approved third injections](#) for about 500,000 clinically very vulnerable adults and older children and it is possible it could simply extend this to people with other health conditions, or who are older.

The JCVI is also believed to have approved the idea of, where possible, booster jabs being given alongside the regular programme of annual flu vaccinations, which are also targeted at older people or those with health conditions.

Another study, [known as ComFluCov](#), has been examining whether it is safe and effective to give both jabs together.

This article was amended on 11 September 2021 to remove references to the “UK” and “Britain” from the headline and introduction. As the body of the text itself makes clear, the prime minister’s plan is for England.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/10/boris-johnson-publish-covid-blueprint-difficult-winter>

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Coronavirus

What is in Boris Johnson's Covid contingency toolbox?



Children's jabs? Boosters? Covid passports? Boris Johnson is keen to avoid a return to restrictions. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

[Nicola Davis](#) and [Peter Walker](#)

Fri 10 Sep 2021 09.51 EDT

As Boris Johnson seeks to avoid a return to restrictions, or even another [“firebreak” lockdown](#), this winter, we take a look at what might be in his “toolbox” of contingency measures for England expected to be announced as soon as next week – and just how useful they may be.

Children's jabs

To jab, or not to jab, all 12- to 15-year-olds has become [a matter of hot debate](#). Last week, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

(JCVI) said it [did not recommend the move](#), saying that while on balance it would bring health benefits, the margin was too small for it to give the green light. The matter is now being examined by the UK's chief medical officers, who are considering wider factors including the potential impact of jabs on education, for example school closures.

Ministers are known to be extremely keen on this happening, with the assumption that the medical officers will give them the required approval.

Vaccinating this age group would reduce the chance of infection or severe illness, although the latter is already far lower than for adults, and could also help to reduce transmission. However, protection against infection is lower than for more severe illness, and Covid vaccines are somewhat less effective against the now-dominant Delta variant.

Booster jabs

[Third jabs](#) have been approved for about 500,000 people with severely weakened immune systems – but these are deemed to be part of their primary vaccination schedule rather than boosters per se.

The JCVI is considering whether a third Covid shot should be given more widely. While no decision is due until next week, there is a growing assumption that some sort of booster programme has been approved – though it may be limited initially to older and more vulnerable people. Ministers want it to happen, and have made plans for immediate distribution, possibly alongside flu jabs.

Some experts [say booster jabs are not necessary](#), and that it would be unethical to give them when poorer countries have yet to vaccinate their populations.

But data from Israel, where a booster programme is under way with third jabs offered to over-40s, suggests there could be benefits. [According to one recent study](#) – yet to be peer-reviewed – seven to 13 days after the third dose the odds of becoming infected with Covid fell 48-68% compared with having two doses, while after 14 to 20 days the odds had fallen to 70-84%.

There are other factors to consider: take-up of second jabs has already levelled off in many age groups in the UK, and at lower levels than first doses. That, experts have said, could be owing to factors including a perception that a second dose is not necessary and that there is less incentive now society is returning to signs of normality.

One question is whether the uptake of a third dose may be even lower. However, some experts have said that is not a given, noting the longer a vaccine is shown to be safe, the more some people may be comfortable about taking it, and that at the very least roughly the same number may be expected to accept boosters as second doses.

Covid passports

Downing Street has said Covid passports will be introduced by the end of the month, making full vaccination a compulsory requirement for entry to nightclubs and other crowded indoor venues in England, without the option of showing a recent negative test or a positive antibody test. On Wednesday, Scotland voted for Covid passports to be introduced on 1 October.

In theory, the idea could help to reduce transmission of Covid, while it may also act as an incentive for people to get vaccinated. But it is a politically fraught area for Johnson, who could lose a Commons vote on such a move if Labour decided to oppose it – and if any such vote were held.

Critics also say that even double-jabbed people can become infected with Covid, while for some the passports may make hesitant people even more reluctant to get jabbed. There are also concerns the plans could be an infringement of civil liberties and discriminatory.

Flu jabs

With very little flu in circulation last year, there is a big concern that people's immunity to the virus is low, leading to fears that flu – together with other winter viruses and Covid – could put the NHS under extreme pressure.

Given that a key factor in whether new Covid restrictions are required is whether the NHS is becoming overwhelmed, keeping levels of flu down could be an important way to reduce the chance of that happening.

In July, ministers [announced the introduction of the largest flu vaccination programme in UK history](#), with either a jab or nasal spray vaccine to be offered free to more than 35 million people. That will include all over-50s and secondary school pupils up to Year 11 as well as all children aged two and three, primary school pupils, people with certain health conditions, unpaid carers, pregnant women, close contacts of immunocompromised individuals, and frontline health and adult social care staff.

To save resources, experts have been looking at [the viability of giving flu and Covid jabs at same time](#), dubbed the “[one in each arm](#)” autumn booster campaign. While an official announcement has yet to be made, the health minister Lord Bethell said on Thursday that Covid boosters would be given alongside flu jabs.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/10/whats-in-boris-johnsons-covid-contingency-toolbox>

[Wales](#)

Covid cases rising in Wales but more lockdowns ‘not inevitable’



Mark Drakeford said there were now around 520 cases per 100,000 people in Wales. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Fri 10 Sep 2021 10.18 EDT

The Welsh first minister, [Mark Drakeford](#), has warned that Covid infections are rising sharply, with the current wave expected to peak at the end of this month. However, he said it was possible to avoid further lockdowns if people behaved sensibly.

Drakeford said the Welsh cabinet would meet next week to discuss whether vaccination passports should be introduced and said the NHS in [Wales](#) was ready to begin giving jabs to children if they are approved.

At a press conference in Cardiff, Drakeford said there were now about 520 cases per 100,000 people in Wales, the highest rate this year.

If the virus continues to spread at its current rate, Drakeford said he expected to see about 3,200 cases confirmed every day at the peak.

The first minister said “pandemic pressure on the NHS” was increasing. There are more than 420 confirmed cases in hospitals across Wales – the highest number since March. At the moment there are about 40 Covid-19 hospital admissions a day. But the modelling suggests there could be 100 new Covid-19 daily admissions when the wave peaks.

Drakeford said health and care services were already experiencing staffing pressures, through a combination of annual leave, staff working in other areas, sickness and isolation. Staff were exhausted.

He asked the public to think about whether they could get care from a local pharmacist or GP rather than going to A&E, and asked them not to visit patients in hospital unless absolutely necessary.

Drakeford said he expected the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation soon to confirm the arrangements for an autumn booster programme.

He said: “There is emerging evidence from Israel that the effectiveness of vaccines may start to decrease after eight months, making a booster jab important. We will start sending invitations out as soon as the announcement is made and our NHS has worked hard to make sure it can start the programme as soon as it gets the go-ahead.

“At the same time, the four UK chief medical officers are continuing to discuss and take further expert evidence about whether the vaccine should be available to 12- to 15-year-olds. We are expecting a decision next week and, if the rollout is agreed, the NHS here, will be ready to begin.”

Warning that the pandemic was not over, Drakeford said: “For six weeks now, Wales has been at alert level 0. This means all businesses are able to open and there are fewer legal restrictions in place to control coronavirus

than at any time since the start of the pandemic. The key message I have to emphasise today is that this does not mean the virus has gone away.”

The first minister was repeatedly asked during his press conference if new restrictions or lockdowns were bound to happen, but said: “Nothing is inevitable.”

Drakeford said the Welsh government’s cabinet would discuss next week the idea of introducing vaccination passports in certain circumstances. “There are a series of practical and ethical issues which need to be considered,” he said.

He said passports would not be introduced in settings where people were obliged to go, but said there could be an argument for them at places where people gathered voluntarily in large numbers, if having two vaccinations could be shown to reduce the risk.

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2021.09.11 - Opinion

- After 20 years, Biden's Afghanistan withdrawal has finally ended the 9/11 era
- I'll never forget being in New York on 9/11 – the day I learned there are no guarantees in life
- The Australia deal shows the UK is happy to compromise climate goals for trade
- It's increasingly clear: Labour's leadership has little idea how to win a political fight

[Opinion](#)[September 11 2001](#)

After 20 years, Biden's Afghanistan withdrawal has finally ended the 9/11 era

[Ben Rhodes](#)



‘The US public supported George W Bush’s declaration of a “war on terror” as a kind of blank slate, with details to be filled in by his administration.’ Donald Rumsfeld and Bush visit the Pentagon, Washington DC, 12 September 2001. Photograph: Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

Fri 10 Sep 2021 12.00 EDT

Foreign policy, for better or worse, is always an extension of a nation’s domestic politics. The arc of America’s war in [Afghanistan](#) is a testament to this reality – the story of a superpower that overreached, slowly came to terms with the limits of its capacity to shape events abroad, and withdrew in

the wake of raging dysfunction at home. Viewed through this prism, President Joe Biden's decisive yet chaotic withdrawal comes into focus.

The story begins with trauma and hubris. On [September 11 2001](#), American power was at its high-water mark. The globalisation of open markets, democratic governance, and the US-led international order had shaped the previous decade. The spectre of nuclear war had been lifted, the ideological debates of the 20th century settled. To Americans, mass violence was something that took place along the periphery of the post-cold war world. And then suddenly, the periphery struck the centres of American power, killing thousands.

As a young New Yorker, I saw a plane plough into the World Trade Center and the first tower fall. I smelled the air, acrid from burnt steel and death, for days afterwards. Like most Americans, I assumed my government would retaliate against the people who did this. But President George W Bush's administration had larger ambitions. [Speaking days after 9/11](#) to an audience that included the US Congress and British prime minister, Tony Blair, Bush declared: “Our war on terror begins with al-Qaida, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.”

Out of this trauma, the American public supported Bush's declaration of a “war on terror” as a kind of blank slate, with details to be filled in by his administration. Most Americans were afraid, wanted to be protected, and were rooting for their government to succeed. Within weeks, Congress granted Bush open-ended powers to wage war, passed the Patriot Act, and set to work reconstructing the US national security apparatus. But rapidly toppling the Taliban and scattering al-Qaida did not meet the ambitions of Bush, who had likened this conflict to the second world war and the cold war. Instead of wiping out al-Qaida's leadership (who escaped into Pakistan) and coming home, the Bush administration decided to build a new Afghan government and then promptly [shifted its attention to Iraq](#) – while tarring its political opponents as weak and unpatriotic. The die was cast.

The objectives of those early years – to defeat every terrorist group of global reach and also build liberal democracies in Afghanistan and Iraq – appear unfathomable with the distance of 20 years, but they were broadly accepted

after September 11, in a climate of American hegemony and post-9/11 fervour. By 2009, when Bush's presidency ended amid the ruins of Iraq and the wreckage of the global financial crisis, it had become clear that those objectives were unachievable, and that American hegemony itself was receding.

But the US national security establishment had been charged with achieving those objectives, and was therefore both invested in their completion and increasingly detached from shifting public opinion.



'Paradoxically, the 2009-2011 troops surge in Afghanistan coupled diminished ambitions and increased resources.' US marines at Camp Dwyer in Helmand province, 2009. Photograph: Manpreet Romana/AFP via Getty Images

The Obama presidency, which I was a part of for eight years, was a gradual reckoning with this reality. Paradoxically, the [2009-2011 troops surge](#) in Afghanistan coupled diminished ambitions and increased resources: the US, Obama concluded, could not defeat the Taliban militarily, but needed to create time and space to defeat al-Qaida and build up an Afghan government to fight the Taliban. This conclusion reflected public opinion: in the politics of post-9/11, post-Iraq, post-financial crisis America, there was zero tolerance for terrorist attacks and zero appetite for nation building. This was

the view that Biden, then vice-president, represented in the White House situation room – arguing against the surge on the grounds that we had to understand the limits of what could be achieved in Afghanistan.

By May 2011, the [killing of Osama bin Laden](#) removed what many Americans regarded as the original rationale for the war in Afghanistan, just as the surge was approaching its endpoints. At the same time that our counter-terrorism mission achieved its greatest success, the expansive new counter-insurgency campaign was proving far more difficult than promised, suggesting that Biden's warnings had been prescient. In June 2011, the American drawdown began.

Obama's downsized ambitions for the “war on terror” triggered harsh reactions from both the jingoistic right and the US national security establishment. For prominent military leaders, congressional hawks, and thinktank warriors who had set out to achieve these impossible objectives, Obama was insufficiently committed to the missions. To admit otherwise, you would have to accept that the mission itself was flawed – and that was a bridge too far for national security elites shaped by post-1989 American exceptionalism. For the Republican party, which had promised great victories in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was impossible to acknowledge there were any limits to our power; instead, it was easier to shift focus to other perceived threats to the US and American identity, which now came not just from “radical Islam”, but from any available Other – be it a black president or immigrants at the southern border.

As president, Donald Trump waged war against a shifting cast of enemies at home with far more gusto than he approached Afghanistan. For a time, he maintained an awkward detente with hawkish elements of the US establishment, [signing off on a small surge](#) in Afghanistan. His disregard for the Afghan people was initially manifest through [increased civilian casualties](#). After he removed national security advisers like HR McMaster and [John Bolton](#), it morphed into a [deal with the Taliban](#) that cut out the Afghan government and set a timeline to withdraw American troops. To the right, national security was tied up with white identity politics at home. To the left, terrorism was more evident in the Capitol insurrection than in distant lands. Trump's withdrawal barely registered in US politics.

In this context, there was no way Biden was going to cancel Trump's deal and extend America's presence in Afghanistan. Having long doubted the capacity of the US military to reshape other countries, he was not going to continue a policy premised on that assumption. Given the [existential threat to American democracy](#) that clouded his transition into power, Biden presumably felt that the purpose of his presidency was to pursue policies responsive to restive public opinion – from a sweeping domestic agenda to a foreign policy for the middle class.

Biden's decision, and the haste with which he carried it out, provoked a firestorm among much of the US national security establishment for several reasons. First, because Biden's logic carried a rebuke of the more expansive aims of the post-9/11 project that had shaped the service, careers, and commentary of so many people. Second, because unlike Trump, Biden is a *part* of that establishment – the former chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, a Washington fixture for decades. Biden's top aides also come from that establishment. These are not illiberal isolationists. Instead, Biden and his team saw the war in Afghanistan as an impediment to dealing with other external threats: from a Russia waging an asymmetric war on western democracy, to a Chinese Communist party aiming to supplant it.

Most importantly, the abandonment of Afghans to the Taliban, and Biden's occasionally callous rhetoric [laying the blame](#) on Afghan security forces, who had fought on the frontlines for years, evoked a sense of national shame – even if that emotion should apply to the entirety of the war, and not simply its end. Indeed, in the chaotic days of withdrawal, the predominant concerns in US politics often had little to do with Afghans. The evacuation of Americans, the danger of Islamic State Khorasan Province, and the loss of US service members eclipsed the gargantuan Afghan suffering. Overwhelming public support for Biden's decision, though undercut by dissatisfaction with the process of withdrawal, confirmed Biden's core instinct: the thing most Americans agree upon is that we went to Afghanistan to take out the people who did 9/11 and prevent further attacks, and it was past time to abandon the broader aims of post-9/11 foreign policy, no matter the subsequent humanitarian cost.

In short, Biden's decision exposed the cavernous gap between the national security establishment and the public, and forced a recognition that there is

going to be no victory in a “war on terror” too infused with the trauma and triumphalism of the immediate post-9/11 moment. Like many Americans, I found myself simultaneously supporting the core decision to withdraw and shuddering at its execution and consequences. As someone who worked in national security, I have to recognise the limits of how the US can shape other countries through military intervention. As someone who has participated in American politics, I have to acknowledge that a country confronting virulent ethno-nationalism at home is ill-suited to build nations abroad. But as a human being, I have to confront how we let the Afghan people down, and how allies like Britain, who stood by us after 9/11, must feel in seeing how it all ended.

It is a cruel irony that this is the second time the US has lost interest in Afghanistan. The first time was in the 1990s, after much of [the mujahideen we supported](#) to defeat the Soviets evolved into dangerous extremists, plunged the country into civil war, and led to Taliban rule.

The final verdict on Biden’s decision will depend on whether the US can truly end the era that began with 9/11 – including the mindset that measures our credibility through the use of military force and pursues security through partnerships with autocrats. Can we learn from our history and forge a new approach to the rest of the world – one that is sustainable, consistent, and responsive to the people we set out to help; that prioritises existential issues like the fight against the climate crisis and genuine advocacy for the universal values America claims to support?

A good place to start would be fighting at home to strengthen our multiracial and multi-ethnic democracy, which must be the foundation of America’s global influence. That effort must include welcoming as many Afghan refugees as we can. What the US needs at the end of the 9/11 era – more than any particular policy, or assertion that “America is back” – is to pursue the kind of politics that makes us a country that cares more about the lives of other human beings like the Afghans we left behind, and expresses that concern in ways other than waging war.

- Ben Rhodes is author of After the Fall: Being American in the World We Made. He served as a deputy national security adviser for Barack

Obama from 2009-2017

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Hadley Freeman's Weekend column**Life and style**

I'll never forget being in New York on 9/11 – the day I learned there are no guarantees in life

Hadley Freeman





One World Trade Center today. Photograph: Matteo Colombo/Getty Images

Sat 11 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

Over the past two decades, 9/11 has taken on all kinds of different meanings for people, from the end of American dominance to the rise of a new kind of terrorism. But when I think of 9/11, the first thing I think of is Tracey Ullman.

I was born and raised in New York City, but I only happened to be there that day because it was New York fashion week, and the Guardian had sent me over from London to cover it for the first time. I was 23 years old. Look at me, Ma, a proper grownup now, getting sent overseas to write news stories! I was due to fly back the evening of 11 September 2001, and only had one show to cover that day, so I treated myself to room service (so grownup) while I watched one of those morning news shows that are really just celebrity interview shows, interspersed occasionally with the headlines. I was delighted when the guest that morning was Tracey Ullman, whom I've always liked. So there I was, eating my breakfast, listening to Ullman, feeling content with the world and totally in control of my life. Then the next interview started, with someone who had written a celebrity biography, and the presenter suddenly interrupted proceedings. A plane, he said, had flown into the north tower of the World Trade Center. Huh, that's weird, I

thought, not especially concerned, because despite feeling like an adult, I was still really a child.

The presenters talked about the incident as if it were an accident, because what else could it possibly be? And then, as we all watched the live footage and I kept eating my room service, the presenters gasped. “We just saw another plane hit the other building!” one of them shouted as the south tower erupted into fire, and my spoon froze on the way to my open mouth and dropped back down to the bowl. Suddenly, military planes flew by my window.

In times of trauma, people often forget the big things but remember the banal details. I don’t remember what happened after that, but I’ll always remember watching Ullman that morning. I remember the cereal I was eating (mini Shredded Wheat), and I remember the fashion party I went to the night before (Marc Jacobs). I also remember the Guardian news desk trying to get me to help with their news coverage, and one day someone will write a bleakly comedic play about how one of the worst terrorist atrocities ever ended up being covered by the fashion press, just because we were all in New York when it happened. I also remember the subject line (“Attacks”) in the email I got the next day from my friend Lizzy to tell me that Cat MacRae, one of my oldest friends, was missing. [Her office was in the north tower.](#)

Like me, Cat was 23 then, so she has now been gone for almost as many years as she was alive. Almost as unnerving is the realisation that my children were born 14 and 17 years after 9/11. I was born just three years after the end of the Vietnam war, and that felt like another era to me, but 9/11 – I remember the cereal I was eating that day. How could it have been 20 years ago? “Time passes” is not a great revelation, but what’s so confusing about 9/11 is that, yes, time has passed, but also it hasn’t. Sometimes it feels like it’s not so much that everything changed on 9/11, but that we’ve never been able to move on from it. Most obviously right now, there’s Afghanistan. But there’s also US and UK politics, so much of which still feels like a reaction to 9/11, from the scaremongering about immigration (the Tories) to the self-loathing about the hawkish reactions at the time (Labour). Would Barack Obama have been elected in 2008 if George W

Bush hadn't insisted on that unwinnable war in Iraq, and if he hadn't, would Donald Trump have even bothered to run for the presidency in 2016? Alternative history is a pointless self-indulgence, but it feels safe to say that if 9/11 hadn't happened, our lives, over the past two decades, would have felt very different, for all of us.

Aside from the historical, there's the personal. Many of us who were close to Cat, including me, ended up having three children, even though we all grew up with only one sibling, and some of us have quietly admitted to one another that it's because we didn't want any of our children ever to be left behind on their own, the way Cat's beloved younger sister, Annie, was. We learned on 9/11 that there are no guarantees in life, even for the best-loved children, so we stocked up. When I interviewed Cat's parents on the 10th anniversary of her death, her father, Cameron, said to me, "One part of you moves on, but another part will always be in 2001." My life has moved forward, but a very large part of me will forever be sitting on that hotel bed, back when I, Cat, all of us, thought we were taking just another bite into our future, only for the spoon to freeze halfway, and all we could do was sit, empty-mouthed and open-mouthed, watching as the world and our lives changed for ever.

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[Opinion](#)[Trade policy](#)

The Australia deal shows the UK is happy to compromise climate goals for trade

[Gwen Buck](#)



Boris Johnson with Scott Morrison: 'It's tough to dispute the conclusion that the government looks willing to trample over long-term commitments and interests for short-term political gain.' Photograph: Andrew Parsons/No10 Downing Street

Sat 11 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

When the prime minister, Boris Johnson, launched trade negotiations with Australia in June last year, he lauded the opportunities of trading with a [like-minded country](#), a land that could ply the UK with reasonably priced [chocolate biscuits](#) and cheap wine.

Except, of course, when it came down to it, there would always be more to this deal than swapping Penguins for Tim Tams. For the environment, current Australian rules do not match up to ours. On animal welfare, pesticide standards and climate change, the approach of the current Australian government isn't the same at all.

Though most of the detail remains hidden, we knew this deal would increase imports of beef from deforested land and food that is produced to lower animal welfare standards. Considering Australia's [recent record on carbon emissions](#), we knew that measures addressing climate and nature would not be the highest priority for the Australian government.

In a letter to UK environmental groups in August, Johnson sought to downplay some of these concerns. He declared that the UK-Australia deal "reaffirms commitments to multilateral environmental agreements, including the Paris agreement". He added that "more trade will not come at the expense of the environment".

Thanks to leaked documents and non-denials, we now know that the environment is at least a bit expendable: the government has apparently [removed references](#) to temperature goals from the deal. The Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, all but confirmed yesterday that [Australia had asked](#) for key Paris agreement climate commitments to be watered down in the deal. And rather damningly for the UK, just weeks before it hosts the UN climate conference Cop26 in Glasgow, it appears to have promptly obliged.

UK government spokespeople have sought to defend themselves by saying that the final text will "contain a commitment to address all the Paris climate goals", with temperature goals being "[implicit](#)" among them. We are left sensing the text is now vaguer and less ambitious [than the UK-EU deal](#). Removing references to specific reductions in temperature lowers expectations. With specificity comes more measurability, and with it more accountability.

Should we be surprised at the decision to give up so easily? While some may argue that this compromise is more evidence of the UK's more "[offensive](#)" trade policy, it does rather look like the UK has backed itself into a corner.

For a long time now UK ministers have pushed a reductive binary choice: either we sign new trade deals and deliver on Brexit, or we fail to honour the referendum result. As one “government source” [told the Telegraph](#) in May: “If we can’t get Australia over the line, then we’re partly accepting our centre of gravity still revolves around Europe.” There is room only for a deal, even if it’s a bad one. And as a result, terrible precedents are being set – for UK trade and for efforts to tackle the climate and nature crisis.

It’s tough to dispute the conclusion that the government looks willing to trample over long-term commitments and interests for short-term political gain. After the outline of the UK-Australia deal was published in June, trade experts [struggled to see](#) where the UK would benefit. It was “as good as what you could possibly get from Australia’s perspective”, while the Australian government celebrated a “[great win](#)” for its own agriculture.

In return, the UK government produced a forecast identifying a potential GDP [boost of 0.02%](#) over 15 years. Farmers reeled at the prospect of lower-quality food imports undercutting their market and undermining their standards. With such concessions for Australia, you have to wonder what other countries with similarly poor environmental records are thinking. What will we do if Brazil demands similar climate-related exemptions in a trade agreement, or the US on food standards?

And then you have more immediate repercussions. The government has spent years touting “world-leading” domestic measures, particularly around nature, and it has genuine aspirations for global green leadership. Right now our leaders must be trying to persuade others to do more, not less, to tackle the climate crisis. That’s why this leak really matters.

Like the prime minister, environmental groups want the UK to be a successful trading nation and host a transformative Cop26. But if we are to do so, we need Johnson to take an approach that matches up to the overwhelming – and increasing – public support for tackling the environmental crisis.

The prime minister must improve UK trade policy. It is currently opaque, with the discussion informed by press releases and leaks. Stakeholders are

bound to non-disclosure agreements. Impact assessments will only be published once negotiations have already concluded. The body set up to analyse trade deals, the trade and agriculture commission (TAC), has been utterly sidelined, with the former chair exasperated at the government's actions.

As recommended by the TAC and the national food strategy, we need the prime minister to support the design of a set of core environmental standards for trade deals. These would make sure imported food meets the same minimum standards on the climate crisis, the environment and animal welfare as food that is produced in the UK. Alongside them, a clear trade strategy should show how issues such as climate and public health fit into the construct of “global Britain”.

And lastly, between now and the aftermath of Cop26, our prime minister needs to not just tell the world that every country must uphold promises and agreements on climate change – but show it too. If that means reviewing and improving the Australia deal, then that is a precedent worth setting.

- Gwen Buck is senior policy adviser at Green Alliance, an independent thinktank and charity focused on the environment

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[OpinionLabour](#)

It's increasingly clear: Labour's leadership has little idea how to win a political fight

[John McDonnell](#)



'The Labour response to Boris Johnson's social care announcement demonstrated starkly just how far the party leadership is from having a strategy to deal with him.' Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Sat 11 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

After this week's performance by the [Labour](#) party, I say – more in sorrow than in anger – that we can't go on like this, something's urgently got to give.

It's more than a year since a new leadership was elected, but the Labour response to Boris Johnson's [social care announcement](#) demonstrated starkly

just how far the party leadership is from having a strategy to deal with him or knowing how to respond to the new political battleground.

Through hard experience you learn the basics of any political fight. You have to nail your opponent and offer a solid alternative.

Nailing Johnson doesn't require invention or much forensic interrogation. His character has become increasingly obvious to people. He is a self-interested liar, whose sole motive throughout his life has been looking after number one. His clowning antics have become passé and largely don't wash any more for people who have gone through such tough times since Covid emerged.

Johnson's achilles heel is, increasingly, trust. It shouldn't have been left to Dawn Butler on the backbenches to call Johnson out for what he is – a blatant and ruthless liar. This should have been a running consistent theme – linked to the month-by-month mounting evidence of his betrayal of all those who believed his lies in the last general election, and to the deceits and corruption of his ministerial team throughout the pandemic.

Increasingly, people are waking up to the fact that Johnson is solely motivated by self-interest. He will always look after himself and people like himself. And that means others will always be sacrificed, whether it's pensioners reliant on the triple lock, families relying on universal credit, or low-paid workers who believed his now broken pledges on income tax and national insurance.

The result is that, just as we have seen in the tax measures to fund social care, the burden of his policies falls on working people, and the wealth of the richest people is protected.

Alongside the failure to nail the image of Johnson in the popular mind, the Labour leadership's failure, or refusal, to take the lead effectively on any issue is becoming a regular embarrassment. It means that, even when Tory support dips in the polls, it does not come to Labour.

Shadow cabinet members are sent out like the “poor bloody infantry”: after making valid attacks on Johnson's policies, they are destroyed by

interviewers simply asking the obvious question, “Well what would *you* do then?”

They are forced on most occasions to repeat the mantra: “It will be in the manifesto.” Apart from coming across as shifty, it confirms the suspicion that Labour has no alternative.

One of the lessons from the 2019 election is that simply announcing an array of attractive policies doesn’t work. Policies need time to bed down into the popular consciousness. The range of new policies in 2019 was planned for the normal electoral cycle, with an election possibly two years off. In desperation during that campaign we launched a policy blitz, which strained credibility with some of the voters we were seeking to attract.

It’s widely accepted that Johnson will go to the electorate early, most probably in the spring of 2023, but rumours abound in Tory circles that he will go in 2022 to avoid the Covid inquiry catching up with him. That’s why Labour needs to set out now at least the bare bones of a policy programme: one that isn’t based on the lowest common denominator of a focus group but excites and motivates people about the type of society a Labour government wants to achieve.

A group of Labour supporters in the communications sector has recommended, as a start, a new pledge card setting out a limited number of solid priority commitments. For me this needs to combine relevance and ambition. So for example,

A Labour government would ensure:

no child will live in poverty or go hungry;

- low pay will be ended with a real living wage;
- the NHS and a new national care service will be fully and fairly funded;
- the privatisation of our NHS and public services will be halted;
- tuition fees will be scrapped, and our schools and childcare will fully funded;

- climate change will be tackled and net zero carbon achieved by 2030 with a Green New Deal.

In addition to coming across as a policy-free zone, Labour's media coverage is regularly soured by displays of division as the party leadership destructively pursues internal factional disputes.

The result has been the loss of more than 100,000 members; the risk of one of our [founding unions disaffiliating](#); and, ironically for a party pledged to tackling antisemitism, reports of Jewish members being more likely [to face disciplinary action](#) than others.

So I say this to whoever is making the decisions at the top of Labour: party members are not the enemy. The Tories have the money and most of the media, but we have the potential of a mass campaigning membership. That equation doesn't always balance out, but it's the most effective we can create.

My fear is that, if the Labour leadership continues on this path, people will increasingly see a party divided and fail to know what it stands for.

It wouldn't take much to unite the party again and mobilise an enthusiastic mass membership with a radical basic set of policies. But time is short and action is needed.

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- John McDonnell has been the Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington since 1997. He was shadow chancellor from 2015 to 2020

2021.09.11 - Around the world

- [Myanmar Reports of 15 or more killed after nationwide uprising call](#)
- [Afghanistan At least four killed in Taliban crackdown on protests, says UN](#)
- [Doha Afghanistan flight carrying more than 100 foreign passengers lands](#)
- [From United 93 to Worth How Hollywood grappled with 9/11](#)
- ['Anything goes' How 9/11 led to a global security clampdown](#)

[Myanmar](#)

Myanmar: reports of 15 or more killed after nationwide uprising call



The fighting in the north-west Magway region was the deadliest since July between government troops and resistance forces. Photograph: Stringer./Reuters

Associated Press

Fri 10 Sep 2021 22.31 EDT

Fifteen to 20 villagers, including several teenagers, have been killed in some of Myanmar's deadliest fighting since July between government troops and resistance forces, a villager and reports by independent media said.

The fighting near Gangaw township in the north-western Magway region started on Thursday, [two days after a call for a nationwide uprising](#) was issued by the National Unity Government, an opposition organisation that seeks to coordinate resistance to military rule.

The fighting broke out when more than 100 troops arrived in four military vehicles to secure the area in Myin Thar and five other nearby villages, a resident told the Associated Press by phone.

Members of a lightly armed village self-defence militia fired warning shots, but could not stop the soldiers from entering the area and clashes continued after that, said the resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity to safeguard his personal security.

The opposition movement that rose against [the army's February seizure of power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi](#) was initially peaceful, but gradually began fighting back after security forces used deadly force to break up nonviolent protests.

The National Unity Government's call on Tuesday for a "people's defensive war" has received an enthusiastic response on social media, but its actual impact on the ground is hard to measure.

Media sympathetic to the opposition reported an outburst of small-scale shootings and sabotage by the resistance, particularly the toppling of mobile phone transmission towers.

But similar activities have been happening for several months and details are difficult to independently verify.

The villager who described the new fighting said at least 11 members of the self-defence group were killed, according to what others in his village told him. Photos of what were described to be their bodies circulated widely Friday on the internet, and were clear enough to be identifiable to those familiar with them.

"We only have handmade guns and percussion lock firearms," the villager said. "When it rained, the guns became useless. There are many casualties due to the imbalance in weapons." Myanmar's government troops are well-equipped with modern weapons and have access to air and artillery support.

The villager said other residents told him that most members of the village's defence force are youths and that five of those killed were 9th- and 10th-

grade students. A middle-school teacher was also said to have been killed, the villager said.

Members of the more than 2,000 households in the area had fled to the jungle, he added, while soldiers camped in abandoned homes and at the local Buddhist monastery. Four more people were confirmed dead after fighting broke out again Friday morning, he said, and an unknown number of houses were burned.

Reports by independent media put the death toll among the villagers at 20 or more. Khit Thit Media, an online news service, said it was told by villagers that the dead included seven non-combatants in addition to the militants.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, an independent organization that keeps detailed tallies of people killed or detained by the military government, there have been 1,058 activists and bystanders killed since February's army takeover.

The government this week claimed resistance forces have been responsible for the deaths of 933 people, reported Popular News, citing deputy home minister Gen Soe Tint Naing.

In a Thursday briefing for foreign diplomats also attended by the news service, Soe Tint Naing said those killed included security personnel, civil servants and people believed by the resistance to be government informers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/11/myanmar-reports-of-15-or-more-killed-after-nationwide-uprising-call>

Taliban

At least four killed in Taliban crackdown on protests, says UN

01:13

Afghans protesters reportedly killed during Taliban crackdown on demonstrations, says UN – video

Peter Beaumont

Fri 10 Sep 2021 08.22 EDT

The Taliban's violent crackdown on protests against their hardline rule has already led to four documented deaths, according to a UN human rights official who said the group had used live ammunition, whips and batons to break up demonstrations.

Ravina Shamdasani, the UN's rights spokesperson, told a briefing in Geneva that it had also received reports of house-to-house searches for those who participated in the protests.

The protests against the Taliban's return to power, many of which have been led by women fearful of their status under the Islamist group, have been the target of violence in a number of locations and were [formally banned this week](#) without prior authorisation by the Taliban's new interior ministry.

Describing the crackdown on dissent as "severe", Shamdasani also described how journalists covering the demonstrations had faced intimidation, including in one case the threat of "beheading", apparently a reference to an incident in which two Afghan journalists [were detained, flogged and threatened](#) earlier this week.

00:56

Afghan journalists describe violent Taliban beatings when reporting on protests – video

“We have seen a reaction from the Taliban, which has unfortunately been severe,” Shamdasani said. “In one case, one journalist was reported to have been told, as he was being kicked in the head, ‘You are lucky you haven’t been beheaded’. Really there has been lots of intimidation of journalists simply trying to do their job.

“We call on the Taliban to immediately cease the use of force towards, and the arbitrary detention of, those exercising their right to peaceful assembly and the journalists covering the protests,” Shamdasani said.

The UN’s comments follow increasing concern over the deteriorating human rights environment in [Afghanistan](#) since the Taliban swept to power last month in the midst of the US-led withdrawal of foreign forces.

Despite public assurances on media freedom, [women’s rights](#) and freedom of expression, the Taliban have rapidly moved to crack down on burgeoning opposition to their return, not least demonstrations that have sprung up in a number of cities.

Earlier this week, in its first move since an [interim cabinet](#) consisting entirely of male, Pashto-speaking Taliban loyalists was appointed, the new interior ministry, led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is wanted in the US for terrorism, banned protests that had not been pre-authorised by the Taliban.

The UN statement adds weight to widespread reporting by media and rights monitors of serious human rights violations that have emerged since the Taliban took power, including claims of extrajudicial killings, arrests, violence, and suppression of freedom of expression and women’s rights.

With Afghanistan [facing a looming humanitarian crisis](#), the US also reiterated on Thursday the message that help from Washington is contingent on the Taliban’s caretaker government living up to its previously voiced commitments to stability for Afghanistan and the region, and demonstrating widespread inclusion.

The US deputy ambassador, Jeffrey DeLaurentis, speaking at the UN security council on Thursday, stressed the US position once again that “any

legitimacy and support will have to be earned”.

He said the standards the international community had set were clear and included facilitating safe passage for Afghans and foreign nationals who wanted to leave Afghanistan and respecting the country’s obligations under international humanitarian law “including those related to the protection of civilians”.

“We’re watching closely to see that those standards are met,” he said.

DeLaurentis added: “The United States remains committed to the people of Afghanistan,” and said that, as the country’s largest humanitarian donor, it was helping partners on the ground provide assistance, “but the needs are vast”.

On Friday, the World Food Programme reported that about 93% of households in Afghanistan were not consuming sufficient food after the increase in prices that followed the Taliban’s return to power. A UN development programme appraisal the day before suggested the country could sink [into almost universal poverty](#) by next year without international help.

The UN’s concerns were voiced as [evacuation flights resumed for foreigners](#), but thousands of at-risk Afghans who had helped the US were still stranded in their homeland with the US embassy shuttered, all American diplomats and troops gone and the Taliban in charge.

Scores of foreigners, including Americans and Britons, left Afghanistan on the commercial flight out of Kabul on Thursday with the cooperation of the Taliban.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/10/at-least-four-killed-in-taliban-crackdown-on-protests-says-un>

[Afghanistan](#)

Afghanistan flight carrying more than 100 foreign passengers lands in Doha



Passengers from the first civilian flight from Afghanistan since the end of the US-led evacuation arrived in Qatar late on Thursday. Photograph: Reuters

Staff and agencies
Thu 9 Sep 2021 22.28 EDT

A flight carrying more than 100 international passengers out of Kabul has landed in Doha, the first such civilian flight since the chaotic evacuation of 124,000 foreigners and at-risk Afghans sparked by the Taliban's swift takeover of the country.

About 113 people were aboard the flight to Doha operated by state-owned [Qatar Airways](#), officials said. The passengers included US, British, Canadian, Ukrainian, Dutch and German citizens.

Qatari special envoy Mutlaq bin Majed al-Qahtani described Thursday's flight as a regular one and not an evacuation, and said there would be another flight on Friday. In Doha, the passengers will initially stay in a compound hosting Afghan and other evacuees.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken thanked Taliban and Qatari authorities, and called the flight a "concrete demonstration" of American commitment to help its citizens and others who helped the US continue to leave [Afghanistan](#).

Earlier, National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne praised Taliban cooperation on the flight. "They have shown flexibility, and they have been businesslike and professional in our dealings with them in this effort," she said, adding that efforts to secure further departures would continue.

US state department spokesperson Ned Price said 10 US citizens and 11 permanent residents were on the flight, out of "the 39 we invited". Canada said 43 of its citizens were on the plane, while the UK and the Netherlands each had 13 on board.

An Afghan-American dual citizen, waiting to board the flight with his family, said the US state department had called him on Thursday morning. "We got in contact with the state department, they gave me a call this morning and said to go to the airport," the father, who asked not to be named, told AFP.

Although international flights have flown in and out with officials, technicians and aid in recent days, this was the first civilian flight since the Taliban captured the capital on 15 August.

In the days that followed the Taliban takeover, the airport had become a tragic symbol of desperation among Afghans terrified of the militants' return to power – with thousands of people crowding around its gates daily, and some even clinging to jets as they took off.

Thursday's Taliban-approved departure comes amid mounting concern over the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation under the hardline Islamist group's new rule, including around freedom of expression and women's rights.

UN secretary general António Guterres pleaded with the international community on Thursday to maintain ties with the Taliban, warning that an "economic collapse" with possibly millions dying must be avoided.

"We must maintain a dialogue with the Taliban, where we affirm our principles directly - a dialogue with a feeling of solidarity with the Afghan people," he told AFP. "Our duty is to extend our solidarity to a people who suffer greatly, where millions and millions risk dying of hunger."

The UN chief said there were "no guarantees" about what might come out of talks but that discussions were a must "if we want Afghanistan not to be a centre of terrorism, if we want women and girls to not lose all the rights acquired during the previous period, if we want different ethnic groups to be able to feel represented."

"Until now, in the discussions that we have had, there is at least a receptivity to talk," added Guterres, who does not rule out going to Afghanistan one day if conditions were right.

Guterres added that the Taliban wanted recognition, financial support and sanctions to be abolished.

"That gives a certain leverage to the international community," he said, adding that "an economic collapse situation which could create appalling humanitarian consequences" must be avoided.

Guterres suggested that, as with Yemen, it is possible to foresee the granting of "financial instruments" to Kabul that would not be subject to current sanctions.

"It is in the interest of the international community and I am not talking about the lifting of sanctions or recognition. I am talking about targeted measures to allow the Afghan economy to breathe."

With Reuters and Agence France-Presse

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[9/11: 20 years later](#)[September 11 2001](#)

From United 93 to Worth: how Hollywood grappled with 9/11



Steven Spielberg on post-9/11 movies: ‘We now know what it feels like to be terrorized.’ Composite: Guardian/AP/Allstar/20TH CENTURY FOX TELEVISION/PictureLux / The Hollywood Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

[*Adrian Horton*](#)

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Fri 10 Sep 2021 13.37 EDT

A common refrain in the days after 11 September 2001 was that the scenes of unthinkable destruction looked like a movie. In some ways, it did: the World Trade Center had been destroyed on-screen in three late-90s blockbusters: Independence Day, Deep Impact and Armageddon. Overnight, movies with bombastic scenes of mass violence all but disappeared; for years afterwards, the attacks themselves, whose imagery saturated the national consciousness, proved too traumatic, too untouchable, to be reimagined for film or TV.

But 9/11 has loomed large over American pop culture in the 20 years since the attacks. As critic James Poniewozik put it, writing about the slate of documentary retrospectives for the anniversary, 9/11 is culturally [not so much a day as an era](#). The attacks have echoed across TV and film – in superhero films and action flicks that pit American heroes against destruction of large cities; in commercially cursed “war on terror” films preoccupied with the pain and patriotic resolve of American soldiers or the fantasy of torture as a successful war tactic; and in the handful of films which have focused on the tragedy directly, such as United 93, World Trade Center and, more recently, [Worth](#).

The attacks on 9/11 had an [immediate, seismic effect on pop culture](#) – just hours afterwards, Hollywood studios began digitally erasing the Twin Towers from posters and films such as Zoolander, Serendipity, Sidewalks of New York and People I Know. In the tense months that followed, “many others were delayed, re-edited, changed or scrapped entirely with studios fearful of offending audiences as America tried to process the culturally traumatic event,” said Terence McSweeney, a film and television scholar at Solent University Southampton and editor of the academic essay collection [American Cinema in the Shadow of 9/11](#).

But within a few years, what was once thought too traumatic became fodder for cinematic reinterpretation – if not directly, then as allegorical stories, beginning in 2005 with Steven Spielberg’s War of the Worlds, which

depicted ash-strewn urban destruction. “9/11 reinformed everything I’m putting into [the film],” [Spielberg said of the movie](#), based in the 1898 HG Wells novel. “We now know what it feels like to be terrorized.”

By 2006, five years after the attacks, some studios were open to addressing the attacks head-on. Tim Bevan, a producer for United 93, didn’t recall any significant pushback or calls of “too soon” at the film’s studio, Universal, at the time of production, he told the Guardian, owing in large part to writer/director Paul Greengrass’s reputation for sensitive and accurate portrayals of real-life political violence, such as in Bloody Sunday, on the 1972 shootings in Northern Ireland.



A still from United 93. Photograph: Entertainment Pictures/Alamy

Both Bevan and Greengrass said the project only proceeded with the cooperation and blessing of the families who lost loved ones onboard the flight – the final hijacked plane, bound for Washington DC, which crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania after passengers stormed the cockpit. “If they had not wanted me to make it, I would not have made the film,” Greengrass said to the Guardian.

World Trade Center, Oliver Stone’s film released three months later, focused primarily on two Port Authority police officers, played by Nicolas Cage and

Michael Peña, surviving hours trapped beneath the wreckage of Ground Zero. United 93, in contrast, skips between three hyper-specific theaters of dawning horror: domestic air traffic control, military headquarters and the plane itself, which flew for 40 minutes after the hijacking.

At the time, Greengrass felt “the true scale” of the passengers’ heroism “had not been seen”. The intent of the film was to avoid politicization, “to try and find a way of telling it as simply as possible”, he said. “And if you tell that story as neutrally as you possibly could, then you would find meanings that were different from the ones that were given to the event and more complex and nuanced.”

Greengrass said he aimed his film at the gap between observers of a tragedy, who feel impersonal grief, shock and sadness followed by a strong desire to return to normal, and families whose loss precludes any sense of normal ever again. “When people say ‘it’s too soon,’ I say, ‘well, it’s not too soon for the families,’” he said. “There is a too soon, and there’s definitely a wrong way to make those films,” he added, but maintained United 93 was “made with the highest care, to the highest, scrupulous standards, with those families”.

Those standards included a meticulous research process and a massive, granular timeline of the day’s events – weeks of mapping known details for the purpose of “disinterring truth from convenient political fiction”, said Greengrass.

Still, the hyper-realism, while perhaps instructive now for viewers too young to have personal memories of shock and disbelief, met with mixed reviews at the time. Stephanie Zacharek, a longtime New York-based film critic, called the film “brilliantly crafted” and “adamantly unexploitative” but still “the most excruciating moviegoing experience of my life”. The Guardian’s Peter Bradshaw, in 2006, called United 93 a “head-on act of courage”, in favorable comparison to World Trade Center, “an act of sentimental primitivism” and a “shaming spectacle”.



Nicolas Cage in World Trade Center. Photograph: EPA

Audience discomfort with reliving the attacks directly is perhaps why there are only a handful of films which tried – Reign Over Me, and parts of Remember Me and Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close. Instead, post-9/11 fears and anxieties have filtered into action films, such as Cloverfield, Battle: Los Angeles and 2012, that weren't nominally about political violence but included staples of 9/11's iconography: collapsing buildings, ash, dust-covered civilians.

The same anxieties have shaped the superhero movies which have dominated the global box office in the 20 years since 9/11, films which consistently stage existential conflicts pitting complicated American heroes against assured destruction of large American cities. “If any genre proves to us that the shadow of 9/11 still looms large in popular culture it is the superhero film where 9/11 continues to be restaged and refought in allegory by very American heroes,” said McSweeney. Films such as Avengers: Age of Ultron, evoke famous imagery from the attacks; as a whole, superhero movies, as [Vox put it](#) in 2015, have become “an endless attempt to rewrite 9/11” into a day when no one had to die.

The same goes for one of the most popular TV shows of the 2000s: Fox’s 24, which directly responded to widespread desire to thwart terrorist attacks.

The show, starring Kiefer Sutherland as counter-terrorist agent Jack Bauer, was in development before the attacks; the first episode, in which a plane exploded, [had to be recut](#) to lessen the parallels. Later seasons played out a fantasy of American preparation and derring-do – as well as the false utility of torture – that played on post-9/11 fears of Muslim terrorists. The second season incorporated Islamist terrorists, [advertised with billboards](#) that read “they could be next door.” (Producer [Howard Gordon later said this was his biggest regret](#).) A fourth season plotline in which a Muslim American family leads a double life as radical terrorists was so controversial that the Council on Islamic-American Relations sat down with 24 producers, leading Sutherland to [read a disclaimer PSA](#) on-air.

Criticism of simplifying, stereotyping, or ignoring Muslim or Arab characters – honestly, the subject of a whole separate essay – also dogged the small genre of films which portray the global “war on terror”. The most critically acclaimed – Kathryn Bigelow’s The Hurt Locker and Zero Dark Thirty – hewed closely to the steely determination, rooted in patriotism and duty, of the American soldier, and the mental and physical effects of never-ending wars more complicated and ambiguous than initially sold to the public. Zero Dark Thirty in particular hinged on the utility of America’s torture of prisoners, a practice exposed and debunked (as seen in one of the most critical “war on terror” films to date, Amazon’s The Report in 2019).



Bradley Cooper in American Sniper. Photograph: Keith Bernstein/AP

None of these “war on terror” films were standouts commercially, with the great exception of Clint Eastwood’s American Sniper in 2014, which is “absolutely the defining American film of the post-9/11 era”, said McSweeney. The film, written by Jason Hall and based on the life of the Navy Seal sniper Chris Kyle, made \$547m at the box office – more than all prior films about the “war on terror” combined. American Sniper was unusually lucrative in large part, according to McSweeney, because it told “the story of the war in Iraq the way Americans would like to remember it, not as a deeply morally ambiguous conflict founded on a lie, but one fought for good reasons, by virtuous men, against a monstrous Other”.

That has been a through-line with pop cultural echoes of 9/11 – the simpler, more coherent, and morally unambiguous the storyline, the more popular the project. Life, of course, doesn’t work that way, which makes the latest film to tackle an aspect of 9/11, Netflix’s [Worth](#), released this month, all the more daring. Directed by Sara Colangelo from a screenplay by Max Borenstein, Worth focuses on the thorny, imperfect work of devising and administering the 9/11 Victims Compensation Fund, which provided over \$7bn to families of 9/11 victims (the program was approved in large part as a way to avoid airline industry-crippling lawsuits). Colangelo’s film orbits around real figures: Kenneth Feinberg (Michael Keaton), the mediation expert who served as special master of the fund, Camille Biros (Amy Ryan), his legal partner in charge of gathering families’ claims, and Charles Wolf (Stanley Tucci), a 9/11 widower who led a group of survivors opposed to the fund’s methodology and, more pointedly, emotional distance from their grief.

Given the weight of the subject matter, “my first instinct was to not get into the project,” Colangelo told the Guardian. Footage of the attack, a formative moment in her young adulthood, “ignites a certain anxiety in me”; she had not seen other 9/11 movies before Worth. But Colangelo had a “complete 180” after seeing Borenstein’s script – the focus on the Victim Compensation Fund “wasn’t fetishizing the tragedy”, she said. “I didn’t have to relive it, sort of like United 93 or something.” She preferred the project’s exploration of effects rather than causes or revivified timeline. “It felt like a script about surviving, not about death. Now that you’ve survived this, what do you do? And what do you do in the wake of this loss?”

Worth is a thoughtful, quiet film, the attack and its chilly, hollow aftermath portrayed in glimpses rather than direct stares – a shot of a television screen with smoking towers, frantic phone calls at 8.42am on the Amtrak to New York, a chicken picante left by Wolf’s wife sitting in the fridge. The film takes place mostly in corporate office buildings, as Feinberg and his team embark on the impossible task of putting dollars and cents to someone’s brother, husband, daughter, sister, wife, son, domestic partner unrecognized by the state. “I was really interested in delving into it, and particularly the moral conundrum of it all,” Colangelo said. “How does math and the calculation of dollars and cents collide with the raw emotion of 9/11 and the heartbreak of thousands of families?”

The film’s use of actual footage from the attack – now a difficult question of sensitivity – is limited to glances at television screens, or reflections in windows; in one scene, Keaton’s Feinberg wakes in the living room chair before news footage of the attack, which ran on an inescapable loop at the time. “I wanted to depict that reality accurately, but without being exploitative,” said Colangelo. Similar sensitivity guided the use of voicemails, anecdotes, and phone calls from victims’ families, which were composites from real artifacts. “We were very eager to protect everyone’s privacy,” said Colangelo, “but we also wanted to make the portrayal accurate.”

Worth, after a well-received premiere at the 2020 Sundance film festival, has had somewhat of a muted release on Netflix. The trickiness of converting recent, raw (even two decades later) tragedy into entertainment is not limited to 9/11 – films on the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico (*Deepwater Horizon*), the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing (*Patriots’ Day* and *Stronger*) and even Michael Bay’s lionized take on the 2012 American embassy attack in Benghazi (*13 Hours*), have had middling to limp box office performances. Perhaps we live in a time of too immense saturation with disaster, and its inescapable, lacerating images, to engage with fictionalized immersions of the real events. Or that it’s human instinct to prefer clear, unambiguous stories – ones that rewrite an un-processable disaster, or distill it to a righteous purpose. With 9/11, Americans have tended to prefer narratives of anger and revenge (*Zero Dark Thirty*, *American Sniper*) over explorations of

grief (Worth) , culpability (The Report), or the jagged, difficult, ongoing work of keeping on.

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Razor wire lines the fence of the detention center at Guantanamo Bay.
Photograph: John Moore/Getty Images

[9/11: 20 years later](#)

‘Anything goes’: how 9/11 led to a global security clampdown

Razor wire lines the fence of the detention center at Guantanamo Bay.
Photograph: John Moore/Getty Images

by [Michael Safi](#)

Fri 10 Sep 2021 09.00 EDT

The moment Wahid Sheikh’s life changed forever was broadcast on television to a global audience of millions, including him. At the time, it appeared to be happening entirely to others, a long way from his Mumbai home. “I watched the buildings collapse, slowly and gradually, sad to watch ordinary people dying,” he recalls.



Wahid Sheikh: ‘Whenever there was a bomb blast anywhere in India, or any terrorist threat, I would be harassed by the police’. Photograph: Handout

Vukosava Crnjanski, a Serbian activist travelling in Denmark, remembers crowds huddled around newsagents reading stories hastily printed on A4 sheets. “People looked so intense and tried to explain to me – it’s an attack on the US,” she says.



Vukosava Crnjanski: ‘People looked so intense and tried to explain to me – it’s an attack on the US.’ Photograph: Zoran Drekalovic/Handout

Ahmed Alaa, in Riyadh, was a child, and does not remember the day at all.

Though separated by distance and different circumstances, in time each would be among those to feel the reverberations of the al-Qaida strikes on the World Trade Center towers and other targets on 11 September 2001.

From Northern Ireland to Tel Aviv, governments had responded to terrorism before by granting extra powers to police and curtailing civil rights. But the US in 2001 was arguably at the peak of its international influence. The attack in [New York](#), perhaps the world’s most recognisable city, was broadcast into homes in every country. The backlash, too, would be globalised.

What followed has been described by [a UN human-rights watchdog](#) as an ongoing “security pandemic”. More than 140 countries pushed through counter-terrorism legislation in the months and years after the New York skyscrapers were brought down. Muslim minorities around the world suddenly felt the glare of security services. In some countries, it was political dissidents, environmentalists or anti-corruption campaigners who now found themselves labelled terrorists.

“A lot of these trends pre-dated 9/11,” says Letta Tayler, an associate director with Human Rights Watch, who leads the group’s research on the war on terror. “But we’ve seen an enormous increase in repression in the name of countering terror. Many of these trends are justified as immediate emergency measures – two decades later, they’ve become the new normal.”

The foundations of a new era were being laid by the evening of the attacks. In his address to a traumatised country from the Oval Office, the US president, George W Bush, debuted a doctrine that would come to bear his name. Countries were put on notice to actively pursue terrorists in their midst. “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them,” Bush said.

In late September, meeting only for a few minutes, the UN security council passed the first of what would become several sweeping – and binding – resolutions, ordering member states to do all they could to prevent terrorism or its financing. Sanctions were soon utilised as a threat to any countries that failed to do so.

“It was maybe the biggest power grab in the history of the security council ... and it’s still not been reversed,” says Prof Martin Scheinin, appointed in 2005 the first UN special rapporteur for the protection of rights in counter-terrorism.



US Department of Defense photo of detainees sitting in a holding area at Guantánamo Bay in January 2002. Photograph: Shane T McCoy/PA

What was allowed in the pursuit of terror was clear by the beginning of 2002, when Guantánamo Bay was opened as a facility for the US to detain accused terrorists without trial, fed by a system of forced disappearances (relabelled “extraordinary rendition”) and torture (“enhanced interrogation”) that [implicated up to 54 countries](#) around the world.

The architects of this new world left something critical undefined. Who, exactly, was a terrorist?

‘What you’re saying is, anything goes’

The police came for Sheikh on 27 September 2001. The same day, India had banned a Muslim students’ group that authorities allege had links to extremists, part of a legal overhaul that would include reviving anti-terror powers that had led to human-rights abuses throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Sheikh, a school teacher, had orthodox views, but was no extremist and had never been linked to violence, nor to the banned Muslim students’ group, he says. To the officers who subjected him to repeated interrogations over the next years – and, he says, severe torture – his denials did not seem to matter.

“Whenever there was a bomb blast anywhere in India, or any terrorist threat, I would be harassed by the police,” he says.

Muslims made up fewer than 1% of the Maharashtra state police force at the time of the September 11 attacks, according to Josy Joseph, an investigative journalist who profiled Sheikh for a new book on India’s intelligence and law enforcement worlds. Ordered to crack down on Islamist terrorism, Indian police forces already implicated in torture and extra-judicial killings turned their sights on communities where they had few informants and little trust.

When a series of train bombings in Mumbai killed 209 people, police again turned to Sheikh – this time jailing him and a dozen other men over the plot.

During the two years that India’s post-9/11 terrorism law was in place, a parliamentary review committee found at least 11,000 people were improperly charged under the act. Another national-security law, known by its initials UAPA, was widened in 2004 to extend to terrorism. Government data released this year showed the conviction rate under this act, which has led to thousands being held in prison for years awaiting trial, was a little over 2%.

The abuse of power by governments did not start in September 2001, but the war on terror provided repressive states with a new way to brand it, argues Nate Schenkkan, a director at the US-based civil-rights nonprofit, Freedom House. “It gave them a vocabulary,” he says.

Fighting “terrorists” became a globally recognised justification for straying from legal standards, often brutally. “It is a way of saying, this person is outside the law,” Schenkkann says. “When you call someone a terrorist, what you’re saying is, anything goes. I can disappear them, I can kill them, I can hold them without trial for years.”

The al-Qaida strikes did not lead to a single war on terror, he says, but dozens of them, prosecuted by individual countries against their own populations. “There are global wars on terror, and everyone gets to define their own terrorists.”

‘I knew they do this to all activists’

This absence of a shared definition of terrorism has been called [the “black hole”](#) at the heart of the global counter-terrorism system built after 9/11. States were quick to grasp the opportunity it presented.

Within a week of the al-Qaida attacks, Chinese foreign ministry spokespeople began to speak of a separatist movement among the country’s Uyghur minority - previously framed as a low-profile internal affair - as part of the global fight against jihadism.

In Chile, members of the indigenous Mapuche tribe who have for decades resisted, sometimes violently, the incursions of logging companies and others on land they consider theirs, had typically been charged with ordinary criminal offences in the 1990s. After 9/11, Chilean governments started used [anti-terrorism laws instead](#).



Ahmed Alaa was detained in Egypt after waving a rainbow flag during a 2017 performance of Mashrou' Leila. Photograph: Handout

Alaa's act of terrorism was to wave a rainbow flag during a 2017 performance in Cairo of the Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila, whose lead singer is openly gay. He was detained by Egyptian security forces a few days later.

"They kept asking me questions about my whole life – nothing to do with the concert," Alaa recalls. "They asked about my life, my childhood, my activism, my religious beliefs, and then I asked them: 'Are you going to send me to the doctor to check if I'm gay?'

"The investigator told me: 'That's not your charge.'"

He was instead charged with offences under Egypt's sweeping anti-terrorism code, including being a member of banned groups, receiving money from foreign organisations and seeking to change the constitution.

Being labelled a terrorist did not shock him. The military government of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi has one of the worst records of abuse of national security laws against journalists, campaigners, lawyers and critics. "I was an activist, and I knew this happens to all activists," Alaa says.

A 2019 UN report has argued abuse of terror charges since 2001 is so endemic in every region of the world that it cannot be viewed as an exception – a few bad apples here and there – but rather as “the hard-wiring of misuse” into counter-terrorism systems.

“What we see here is country after country establishing a two-tier system of rights, one for alleged terrorism suspects, and people the government wishes to conveniently label terrorists, and one for the rest,” Tayler says.



Saudi activist Loujain al-Hathloul makes her way to appear at a special criminal court for an appeals hearing, in Riyadh, March, 2021. Photograph: Ahmed Yosri/Reuters

Over the past year alone, Saudi women’s rights campaigner Loujain al-Hathloul was sentenced to five years in jail by a counter-terrorism court (she was released on probation in February but is still subject to restrictions), while Belarus [forced a commercial flight](#) to land in Minsk, detaining journalist Raman Pratasevich on a terrorism watch list since November. In Tanzania, the main opposition leader, Freeman Mbewe, is currently in prison awaiting trial on terrorism charges.



Journalist Raman Pratasevich was flying from Greece to Lithuania when authorities ordered the plane to land in Minsk, where he was arrested.
Photograph: AP

“When the Egyptian government says we’re fighting terrorism, it’s a green light for their crimes,” says Alaa, who was assisted by a Canadian nonprofit organisation to flee and seek asylum there. “They say, if I’m fighting terrorism, don’t ask me about human rights.”

States such the US and UK occasionally voice careful criticism of Egyptian abuses but continue to give the country military aid and sell it weapons. The French president, Emmanuel Macron, last year awarded Sisi his country’s highest civilian honour. His justification was familiar: [a boycott on weapons sales](#) would only “reduce the effectiveness of one our partners in the fight against terrorism”.

‘For the Bin Ladens of the world’

Detentions without trial, torture, extra-judicial killings and other abuses justified by wars on terror are just the tip of the iceberg, argues Scheinin. Below the surface, more wide-reaching and largely unseen, are the electronic surveillance regimes that have mushroomed in many countries over the past two decades.

The attacks on the US occurred just as the internet was accelerating its march into billions of lives. Terrorism has stalked debates over how, and to what extent, this new digital space should be governed.

In rare cases, as in the attempt of the FBI to force Apple to unlock the iPhone of one of the San Bernardino shooters, governments have publicly cited the terror threat to justify breaching privacy. More often, such as in the mass metadata collection carried out by the US National Security Agency – and exposed by [Edward Snowden in 2013](#) – populations have been kept in the dark.

It is likely that states would have sought to bring the internet under control even without the war on terror, but armed with its justification, “the bad things came earlier and faster”, Scheinin says.

Tools initially developed to fight wars on terror have now entered the private market, sold by companies such as Israel’s NSO Group to governments without the ability to do it themselves. NSO has justified the sale of their powerful, invasive phone-hacking software Pegasus as designed for use against “the Bin Ladens of the world”. A former director mused that she had visited the World Trade Center memorial site and wished the spyware had been available then to avert the attacks.

In practice, evidence is now overwhelming that governments such as India, Hungary, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia systematically use Pegasus to spy on lawyers, journalists and activists. NSO has said it investigates any credible allegations of misuse, but admits it cannot detect human rights abuses unless they are highlighted by the media or whistleblowers.

Rolling back on the world created by the war on terror has proved difficult. In 2016, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a Paris-based organisation established by the G7 group to strengthen financial crime laws around the world, reversed a 9/11-era warning it issued that non-profit groups were “particularly vulnerable” to terrorist financing.

That warning had given license for many governments around the world [to declare “open season” on NGOs](#), one analyst told Reuters, freezing accounts

and arresting their members on often spurious charges of money laundering or funnelling money to terrorists. It has contributed to suffocating environments for civil societies around the world, of which just 4% are currently considered “open”, according to the watchdog group Civicus.

Yet it continues to be misused by some countries. The Serbian nonprofit, CRTA, monitors democracy in the Balkans – introducing among other things the country’s first political “truth-o-meter”, and its first published parliamentary transcripts.

Last year it was listed along with dozens of other organisations perceived to be critical of the country’s president, Aleksandar Vučić, whose banks may need to cough up sensitive financial information in line with what the government claims is its new global financial standards, passed to comply with FTFA regulations.

Crnjanski fears the information will be leaked to the media as part of a smear campaign to frame her work in the country’s government-friendly media as elitist and unpatriotic. “They want to portray us as people who are getting rich, who drive expensive cars, who are rich foreign agents,” she says.

The Serbian government has not followed through on the order, amid an outcry by FATF and international monitors. But Crnjanski says the damage has already been done: a system empowered to fight terrorism, two decades later, is being misused by rightwing populist governments to crack down on dissent.

“We are trying to develop democracy, to strengthen institutions … It’s about trust in our work, and people are now afraid to approach us. It helps [create] this huge distrust in the work of investigative journalists, in civil society.”

Some of the flood of counter-terrorism laws passed since 2001 may have been necessary and effective. But precisely *which* laws is unclear, perhaps even to governments themselves.

A Geneva-based research group last year convened a panel of experts, including policymakers, to assess the effectiveness of a range of counter-

terrorism measures on the books in several countries. They include the ability to close mosques being used to spread extremist propaganda, bans on “glorifying” terrorism, and police powers to stop and search terrorist suspects.

“There was this idea that there must be a wealth of knowledge here about what works and what doesn’t,” says Michael Moncrieff, a member of the research team that convened the meeting. To their surprise, he says, most governments appeared to have no measurable way to assess if a policy was working – and therefore, if the restrictions those policies imposed on freedoms were worth it.

“The main takeaways were that up to this point, very few governments have really made efforts to monitor the effectiveness of a lot of their policies,” Moncrieff says. “They kind of take it at face value, whether these things are working or not. And even less seen are the side effects upon civil society and areas like that.”

In 2015, Sheikh was freed from jail in Mumbai after nine years. A long-running terrorism trial found him not guilty, while sentencing five of his co-accused to death. One of them, Kamal Ahmed Ansari, was condemned despite electronic evidence showing he was in Nepal on the day he was accused of planting bombs.

Sheikh has formed a group called the Innocence Network, trying to free those he was jailed with and others imprisoned on spurious terrorism charges. For Ansari, it is too late. Already a victim of one era-defining event, in April he succumbed to another. His family learned through a WhatsApp group that he had become ill in his prison cell and was transferred to hospital, where he died 10 days later. The cause was Covid-19.

- *Additional reporting by Milivoje Pantovic in Belgrade*
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Afghanistan: Taliban claim to have taken control of Panjshir valley

00:47

Taliban claim victory over last resistance stronghold of Panjshir province – video

[Akhtar Mohammad Makooi](#) in Islamabad

Mon 6 Sep 2021 08.14 EDT

The Taliban have fought their way to the capital of Panjshir, the last Afghan province holding out against their rule, and seem on the brink of total victory.

The group posted pictures on social media showing Taliban fighters standing in front of the gate of the governor's compound. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid issued a statement, saying Panjshir was under the control of Taliban fighters.

“With this victory, our country is completely taken out of the quagmire of war,” he said.

Breaking: [#Taliban](#) liberated [#Panjshir](#) . pic.twitter.com/UxNTIBYh7S

— Tariq Ghazniwal (@TGhazniwal) [September 6, 2021](#)

“Panjshir province, which was the last remaining nest of the escaped enemy, was cleared this morning and last night,” he added at a press conference. “Emirate [Taliban] forces have an active presence there now.”

Mujahid said the Taliban tried to take Panjshir through negotiations but attempts failed after Amrullah Saleh and Ahmad Masoud, commanders of

the resistance forces, refused to negotiate.

“We tried to end the war after we conquered Kabul and that was the plan, but unfortunately some [fighters] escaped from Kabul to Panjshir with a massive amount of equipment and were trying to disrupt the nation,” he said.

In a voice message on Monday, Masoud did not reject the Taliban’s Panjshir claim and said members of his family were killed during the overnight attack. He urged resistance to continue.

“I have a message to our people, whether they are inside the country or outside, I ask you to start national rebellion for the the dignity and freedom of this country,” he said. “The resistance front will continue its efforts and will be with Afghans until victory day.”

If Taliban control is confirmed it would be the first time the valley has fallen since the start of Afghanistan’s four decades of conflict. It was a centre of anti-Soviet resistance in the 1980s, and then a holdout against the Taliban in the 1990s.

In another clip, the Taliban appeared to be raising their flag in Panjshir’s provincial capital.

نمایه تصویری فتح ولایت پنجشیر pic.twitter.com/rvMLVgSD46

— عمر افغان (@umar313afg) [September 6, 2021](#)

“The last region where all forces from Afghanistan were gathering, was captured by mujahedeen and it’s 7.20am and we raised our flag and it waving here now,” a Taliban commander said in a clip from Panjshir’s provincial governor compound. “Friends from Farah and Helmand sections are busy with clearance operations in the city.”

A spokesman for the resistance group the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRFA) had earlier said that the province had fallen.

“Taliban’s claim of occupying Panjshir is false,” the group said in a [tweet](#). “The NRF forces are present in all strategic positions across the valley to

continue the fight. We assure the [people] of Afghanistan that the struggle against the Taliban and their partners will continue until justice and freedom prevails.”

The situation was complicated by reports that Fahim Dashti, the spokesman for the resistance, was killed in a battle on Sunday. Dashti was the voice of the group, an adviser to Massoud and a prominent media personality during previous governments. He was the nephew of Abdullah Abdullah, a senior official of the ousted government who has been involved in negotiations with the Taliban on the future of Afghanistan.

[Map](#)

Massoud, who leads a force made up of remnants of regular Afghan army and special forces units as well as local militia fighters, called for a negotiated settlement with the Taliban before the fighting broke out around a week ago.

Several attempts at talks were held but they eventually broke down, with each side blaming the other for their failure.

He said in a Facebook post on Sunday that he wanted “to reach a lasting peace”.

“The NRFA in principle agree to solve the current problems and put an immediate end to the fighting and continue negotiations,” Massoud said.

“To reach a lasting peace, the NRFA is ready to stop fighting on condition that Taliban also stop their attacks and military movements on Panjshir and Andarab,” he said, referring to a district in the neighbouring province of Baghlan.

Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, said the capture of Panjshir marked the end of the war and warned: “Anyone who touches a gun and talk about resistance, is the enemy of the entire nation.”

He said the Taliban would announced the line-up of its new government and pleaded for the international community to continue aid shipments to the war-torn country.

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, was due to arrive in [Qatar](#) on Monday as he seeks a united front with regional allies shaken by the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

Blinken plans to meet rescued Afghans as well as US diplomats, who have relocated functions from the shuttered embassy in Kabul to Doha.

On Wednesday, he will head to the American airbase of Ramstein in Germany, a temporary home for thousands of Afghans moving to the US, from which he will hold a virtual 20-nation ministerial meeting on the crisis alongside the German foreign minister, Heiko Maas.

Blinken will also speak to the Qataris about efforts to reopen Kabul's ramshackle airport – a pressing priority that is necessary for flying in badly needed humanitarian aid and evacuating remaining Afghans.

The Taliban have promised that they will keep letting Afghans leave if they want to – one of the key issues that US allies expect to discuss in the talks in Germany.

The US says it will monitor the Taliban's follow-up on commitments as it determines its future course with the Islamists, whose 1996-2001 regime toppled by US forces was notorious for an ultra-austere interpretation of Islam that included public executions and a severe curtailing of women's rights.

US officials have said Blinken does not plan to meet the Taliban, who have also made Doha their diplomatic base from which they negotiated the US pullout with the previous administration of Donald Trump.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/06/afghanistan-resistance-leader-says-he-welcomes-talks-with-taliban-panjshir>

[British army](#)

British veterans of Afghanistan war will feel vulnerable, says minister



The Afghanistan Camp Bastion Memorial in Stafford, England, which is dedicated to those who lost their lives during British combat operations in Afghanistan. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Mon 6 Sep 2021 05.39 EDT

British veterans of the conflict in [Afghanistan](#) will be feeling vulnerable and questioning whether their service was worth it as they witness the country fall to the Taliban once again, a UK government minister has said.

James Heappey, the armed forces minister and former [British army](#) officer, was forced to backtrack during media interviews on Monday over a claim he

made that a soldier who served in Afghanistan had taken his own life in the last few days.

Heappey had told Sky News that the soldier killed himself over the withdrawal of foreign forces and subsequent resurgence of the Taliban but in later interviews with other outlets said he appeared to have been mistaken.

On BBC Radio 4 Today's programme, he said while he was "embarrassed" that he had made the mistake, it did highlight an "important point" that Afghanistan veterans would be feeling "more vulnerable" and questioning whether their service was worth it.

Heappey, who served at least two tours in Afghanistan, including in Sangin in Helmand Province in 2009, said: "At this particular time it is veterans of the conflict in Afghanistan that are feeling particularly vulnerable and everything we can do to tell them their service is valued, we respect it, it wasn't in vain is important."

He was speaking as the Taliban claimed to have [taken control of the Panjshir valley](#), the last Afghan province holding out against their rule.

The prime minister, Boris Johnson, is expected to announce an additional £5m to help military charities offering mental health support for veterans with the aim of ensuring "no veteran's request for help will go unanswered".

Johnson and the foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, have both been subject to criticism over the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and their response since the Taliban takeover.

The Taliban took control of Afghanistan three weeks ago, taking power in Kabul on 15 August after the western-backed government collapsed and the president, Ashraf Ghani, fled the country.

Speaking on ITV's Good Morning Britain, Heappey said he had revealed details of the apparent suicide after seeing a note posted on social media.

"A suicide note was shared on social media at the back end of last week which referred in very, very accurate detail to the tour that I served on which was with 2 Rifles in Sangin in 2009," he said.

“I am deeply embarrassed to have reflected on something which I had seen on social media and struck me as very true and had affected me deeply.”

- *In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255). In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.*
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/06/british-veterans-of-afghanistan-war-will-feel-vulnerable-says-minister>

[Afghanistan](#)

Disabled Afghans in special jeopardy, warns exiled campaigner



Blind Afghan human-rights activist Benafsha Yaqoobi says her fellow disabled Afghans are without support and at risk of discrimination

[Jessica Murray](#) Midlands correspondent

Mon 6 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

World leaders must act to protect disabled Afghans who are in immediate danger under [Taliban](#) rule, a prominent blind human rights activist has urged after being evacuated to the UK.

Benafsha Yaqoobi, a commissioner at the [Afghanistan](#) Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), said she fears the Taliban will neglect and discriminate against people with disabilities due to the belief, held by many in the country, that disability is a punishment from God for the sins of parents.

Speaking to the Guardian, Yaqoobi said: “I want from the UK and EU to please, please, create a special visa for women whose lives are in danger, people with disabilities whose lives are in danger.

“There are millions of people with disabilities there without any support, without food, without clothes, without education, without any basic human rights. We must raise their voices.”

After a distressing journey to Kabul airport, Yaqoobi was evacuated by the Danish and travelled to the UK where she has spent the past 10 days in quarantine in a London hotel, and said she plans to contact [activist Malala Yousafzai](#) to discuss ways they could work together to help those suffering under the Taliban.

“I am scared the plight of the Afghan people will fade from the news. People with disabilities and women need help, people will die,” she said.

Yaqoobi and her husband, Mahdi Salami, who are both blind, were guided to Kabul airport by an assistant who is now in hiding in the country. She said they were beaten and pepper-sprayed during their three attempts to flee, and when she heard gunfire she feared her husband and assistant had been killed.

“It was really traumatic as a person with visual impairment. When they were shooting, they were shooting into the air, but I didn’t understand,” she said. “I was crying too much. It was really difficult for me and I couldn’t control myself, I screamed.”

She said there were children falling over and being trampled and injured outside the airport gates, where she and her husband were repeatedly pushed back. On their third attempt to escape, they were rescued under darkness after waiting for five hours in a remote location.

Yaqoobi believed she would be killed by the Taliban if she didn’t flee the country as a woman in a prominent position. She was often recognised in the street, and gave an hour-long TV interview just four days before Kabul fell.

“I was very scared because I was so well known. I covered my face with sunglasses and a mask, and went out the house to see if I would be

recognised. When I got a taxi the driver said he knew me and had seen me on TV last week,” she said. “I felt I could be introduced to the Taliban very easily.”

Yaqoobi has served on the AIHRC since 2019, and along with her husband founded the Rahyab Organisation to provide education and rehabilitation training for blind Afghans.

Since taking power in Afghanistan last month, the Taliban has sought to assure the population it will respect the rights of women and minorities, and will not return to the brutal regime it implemented during the 90s when the group was last in control.

However, these assertions have been met with doubt by many and there have been [reports of human rights abuses in the country](#).

“We will see in the future whether it happens. But the important issue for me now is people are dying, they’re starving and trying to leave,” said Yaqoobi, adding she hopes one day it may be safe for her to return to her home country.

“I don’t have anything now. But I have a big hope. Although I was forced from my nation, they will not take it from my heart for ever.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/06/disabled-afghans-in-special-jeopardy-warns-exiled-campaigner>

[Australia news](#)

Australian defence force chief surprised by speed of Afghanistan's 'cascade collapse' to the Taliban



Taliban fighters patrol the streets of Kabul on August 23. Australia's defence force chief says Afghanistan's fall to the Taliban happened faster than anticipated. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

Daniel Hurst Foreign affairs and defence correspondent
[@danielhurstbne](https://twitter.com/danielhurstbne)

Sun 5 Sep 2021 22.49 EDT

The chief of the Australian defence force says he was surprised by the speed of Afghanistan's collapse to the Taliban – but it was accelerated by “some interesting force deployment choices”.

While conceding the “cascade collapse” occurred faster than anticipated, General Angus Campbell praised the ADF personnel who had helped airlift

more than 4,000 people out of Kabul, saying the figure was “way beyond” initial expectations.

Campbell made the comments amid intense discussions in the UK and the US about intelligence failures over the speed of the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, which culminated in the Islamic fundamentalist militants [taking the capital city on 15 August](#).

The UK foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, [said last week](#): “In fairness, collectively across allies, the assessment that they would not be able to advance at that speed was not correct.”

The Australian government was worried enough about the security outlook to [close its embassy in Kabul in May](#), ahead of the withdrawal of US and allied forces after 20 years of military engagement in Afghanistan. In early July the government confirmed the final 80 Australian troops had left the country.

Asked on Monday about his assessment at the time of the Taliban’s prospects, Campbell said he had been surprised at the speed of “the cascade collapse in Afghanistan”.

Campbell said collapse to the Taliban, Afghan government success or some sort of accommodation with the Taliban “were all possibilities”.

But the momentum of the Taliban effort made either accommodation or cascade collapse the more likely outcomes, he told the Australian National University’s Crawford Leadership Forum.

“But I don’t know of anyone who predicted, other than in the glory of 20/20 hindsight, how quickly it would occur, accelerated by, I think, some interesting force deployment choices, and also by the departure of their president,” Campbell said.

This latter point was a reference to the decision of Afghanistan’s president, Ashraf Ghani, to flee the country in mid-August as Taliban forces closed in on Kabul.

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Photograph: Tim Robberts/Stone RF

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Campbell did not elaborate on his observation about “some interesting force deployment choices”.

Guardian Australia asked a defence spokesperson whether that comment was a reference to the then Afghan government's security forces or to the way in which the US handled its withdrawal.

A spokesperson said that the comments were related to the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces and were "not related to the deployment of Australian, US or other allied forces".

"For security reasons, Defence does not comment on specific details related to the force posture of its own or foreign military forces," the spokesperson said.

The US has faced criticism from other observers about how it carried out the withdrawal of forces in the lead-up to the 20th anniversary of the 11 September terrorist attacks, including the sudden closure of the Bagram airbase in early July.

The US departure from Bagram – the base north of Kabul that was the symbolic and operational heart of the American military operation in Afghanistan – was marred by disorganisation. A gap between the American troops leaving and their Afghan replacements arriving allowed looters to ransack parts of the base.

Last week, the US president Joe Biden said the US had assumed Afghan national security forces would be a strong adversary to the Taliban, but they "did not hold on as long as anyone expected".



The chief of the Australian defence force, General Angus Campbell.
Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

During the ANU webinar, the ADF chief went on to say he “wasn’t anticipating … that that collapse would be so immediate”.

But he said there had been “enough uncertainty about the security situation for a range of advice [to be] offered to government that gave them consideration with regard to whether that embassy should close or not, or should temporarily close”.

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The fall of Kabul to the Taliban prompted a last-ditch evacuation mission by the Australian defence force and other allied forces, seeking to airlift out citizens and Afghan nationals who had provided assistance.

“With regard to the airlift from Kabul, I think it’s important to recognise that more than 4,000 people were lifted, way beyond the number that was initially anticipated that Australia would be lifting,” Campbell said.

“Not everybody who wanted to be withdrawn was able to get to the airport. And that lift could not continue beyond the 31st of August.”

After a week and a half of flights, the Australian government pulled its defence forces and other officials out of Kabul airport on 26 August, just before the suicide attacks that killed more than 60 Afghan civilians and 13 American military personnel.

Some interpreters who worked with the Australian and New Zealand militaries in Afghanistan said they felt abandoned by the governments they once served. One interpreter who worked for the ADF and held a temporary visa said he had spent five days outside the airport, sleeping in the dirt with his wife and young child.

As a Senate committee prepares to examine Australia’s 20-year-long engagement in Afghanistan and the adequacy of the withdrawal preparations, Campbell said the ADF personnel who conducted the August airlift were in a difficult environment.

“I think that the let’s say the entrails of exactly how we did it will all be pored over, but I think that Australia should be proud of what we were able to achieve in a very difficult situation,” Campbell said.

“Certainly, I am greatly thankful to the air and ground personnel who undertook it in a very uncertain environment.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/sep/06/adf-chief-surprised-by-speed-of-afghanistans-cascade-collapse-to-the-taliban>

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Interview

Jack O'Connell: 'Eventually the wheels come off, everything explodes'

[Eva Wiseman](#)



'I'm trying to be better': Jack O'Connell, wearing shirt by Thom Sweeney at [mytheresa.com](#). Photograph: Jason Hetherington/The Observer



Sun 5 Sep 2021 13.46 EDT

“Are you here to see man?” asks a Spanish waiter as I walk through the café garden, and points towards the table just beyond the loos where Jack O’Connell stands, his hand raised in a solemn hello. Yes I say. Yes I am.

To sit in the dark and watch Jack O’Connell’s work, from the very earliest characters he played (a boy accused of rape in *The Bill*, Pukey the skinhead in [*This Is England*](#)) through to self-destructive lad Cook in teen drama [*Skins*](#) and the boy incarcerated with his dad in prison drama [*Starred Up*](#), followed by a squaddie in Northern Ireland in the Troubles film ’71, is to watch a slow portrait of contemporary masculinity. What O’Connell does, with his eyes and voice, and careful violence, is show the vulnerability beneath his characters’ cracked shells, and I’m keen now to find out how much of them is him, and how much of him is them, and what he’s learned about masculinity.

Unfortunately, though, it is 2021, and it has never been harder to talk about being a man, yet this is how we begin.

“It’s quite a... complex topic, isn’t it?” O’Connell says, taking a swig of his juice (flavour: red). “I grew up in a lot of genuinely macho environments. My dad played football for a team until I was seven, and I can still

remember that musk of the dressing room.” This was Derby in the mid-90s, when his late dad, an Irish immigrant, worked on the railways. He wanted to be a footballer too, but injuries got in the way, and then a hairdresser, because it looked glamorous, and then he wanted to join the army, but his juvenile criminal record ruled that out. “The environment with my uncles was a jovial one, with hilarity, honesty.” He leans back. “I don’t think the term ‘toxic masculinity’ is very helpful though. It makes me feel... a certain way to see men’s lives getting clouded by it, and burdened.”



‘I grew up in macho environments’: Jack wears jumper by Wales Bonner, trousers by Sefr both at [matchesfashion.com](https://www.matchesfashion.com)), watch by [jaeger-lecoultre.com](https://www.jaeger-lecoultre.com). Photograph: Jason Hetherington/The Observer

The waiter gives a jolly thumbs-up from across the room.

“Men are a chastised group within society. But my experience with male-dominated crowds was always that they were... gentleman.” Is he sweating slightly? He wipes his face, tanned after shooting in the North African desert, a series about (“Oh, you’ll love this”) the foundation of the SAS. “Misogyny is a pig-ugly trait, but you could also call it a self-absorbed, self-serving self-centredness. And no one likes a selfish cunt.” We relax for a second. “It’s tough. I mean, I read the *Guardian*. And a lot of time I feel targeted, just by virtue of being a lad.”

I feel bad. I intended this to be a gentle celebration of Jack and his trade, the question about men simply a fun way in, but of course I was ignoring the political fog that we're sitting in. Would he like something to eat? I join him in an avocado toast. "I suppose, with my work, I've been able to explore 'masculinity', and those type of themes, and hope to do justice to the reality of them, as opposed to showing them in 2D." O'Connell started acting at school, where drama classes were "a welcome change from being sent to face the wall in the corridor," and was soon accepted into the [Television Workshop](#) in Nottingham. They met twice a week and all day Sunday, and it seems to have saved him from the kind of life he went on to play on film. On the day he was starting a show at the Royal Court in London he was in real court waiting to find out if he was getting a custodial sentence; when he came to London for auditions he'd sleep on a park bench. He has a rare talent; he credits luck. "I'm hyper-aware of just how much fortune has been involved, a series of events that simply would not happen now."

He ticks them off on his fingers. "Well. My dad got free travel because he worked on the railway. They don't do that any more. The workshop that I trained at now has to charge people. At school, drama was compulsory, now it's off the curriculum. I mean, I would not know how to advise a young lad from an area like mine how to get into a career like this." He's 31 now and has got more political with age. "Of course, I watch PMQs and listen to LBC, because, well, I pay taxes." And what's he seeing? "The world's going backwards, isn't it? Which goes against the agreement, doesn't it? The agreement that we pay into society and hope that decent decisions will be made." Does it make him angry? "Sometimes. Sometimes it makes me energised."

O'Connell was 17 when he was cast in *Skins*, and during the rehearsal week they went to Glastonbury. They got there late on the Friday night, and were met by the original cast – the Nicholas Hoult and Dev Patel generation – for "a bit of a passing of the mantle". There was, he remembers grinningly, "out-and-out outrageousness everywhere you looked", and then suddenly he was famous, for playing a hedonistic criminal in what the [Parents Television Council](#) called "the most dangerous television show for children that we have ever seen". That character, he says, was "Half created for me and half by me. Yeah, there were certain traits that bled into my own life for sure. Did I play up to it? Probably. And did I pay for it eventually? Definitely. You

start thinking that really is your personality. And it's not until things calm down a bit that you actually get a bit of clarity. So while most people were either finding their feet with their careers, or getting into higher education, we were thrust into the centre of a very popular teen programme." He shakes his head. "It catches up with you." What happened? "Eva, I don't want to get myself into trouble, this is a Sunday supplement. But, you know, eventually the wheels come off and something explodes. And you start looking around eventuallygoing, 'Oh fuck, none of my original mates want to talk to me.'" And now? "Where things are at the minute, I really, really cherish."



Hard knocks: Jack O'Connell as Pukey, right, in *This Is England*.
Photograph: FilmFour/Sportsphoto/Allstar

After the *Skins* wildness had died down, O'Connell's next big break was a call saying that Angelina Jolie wanted to meet him. She cast him as Louis Zamperini in [Unbroken](#), about a man who competed in the 1936 Olympics, crash-landed as a Second World War bombardier and survived 47 days at sea before being made a POW for two years.(Over the decades both Tony Curtis and Nicolas Cage had been attached to star.) "Walking in for that first meeting was nerve-wracking. It's a funny one, when you meet Americans. Because if you have a strong regional accent," he gestures to his strong regional accent, "there's a danger of being misconstrued as their equivalent of a conservative redneck who'd vote Trump. In Angie's case that did not

apply. Which in my experience is quite a rare thing.” When they started working together on *Unbroken* in 2014 she chartered a helicopter to Derbyshire to take his family out for dinner. “And working with her kind of bumped me up a few levels on the list.” The list! The list. When actors talk about the list, always with the same blank shudder, I imagine a biblical scroll, complete with social media rankings, possibly written in blood. “Right, that’s why I deleted Instagram.” Why? “George Clooney told me to. It took about three years from him giving the advice though for me to take it. It’s show *business*, isn’t it?”

It’s because of this that he feels some self-loathing after certain projects. “I hope this doesn’t come across as too pretentious,” he says, leaning back, “But when I’m working, I like to be as unselfconscious as possible. If you’ve watched yourself a lot, it can find its way into your thought process, and for me it started to border on vanity. So I’ve knocked social media on the head for a bit. The best art happens by accident, when you’re not deliberately trying to manufacture something, you’re just zoned in and present, not when you’re thinking about how it’s going to look on telly.” The social media sobriety started at the beginning of the pandemic, when O’Connell moved back to Derby with his mum. Every weekend during the lockdowns they went to the virtual pub – the [Bell & Castle](#) on Burton Road did a live feed – “and it gave us all a big Saturday night in. GenuinelyMade a huge difference.” He learned to make pizza. His lockdown was, he says smiling, “not extraordinary”. By which he means, exactly how he likes it.

We’re meeting to talk about [The North Water](#), a beautiful but grim survival drama set on an 1850s whaling ship. It was shot in the Arctic on two boats – one modern, with a bar from which O’Connell and his co-stars Colin Farrell and Stephen Graham would stare at the glaciers with a pint in hand, and the other a replica of a period whaler. Viewers who haven’t read the novel that writer-director Andrew Haigh based the series on get a hint of what’s to come from the Schopenhauer quote it opens with: “The world is hell, and men are both the tormented souls and the devils within it.” O’Connell plays ship’s surgeon Patrick Sumner, a man who attempts to bring order to an increasingly brutal voyage. There is blood, there is devilry. But apart from that, it sounds like it was lovely. “It was amazing – the constant awareness of the threat of polar bears, occasional visits from walruses popping up from under the ice. It made for something altogether unforgettable. And I was

dying to work with Andrew Haigh. He's got an element of sadism to him; he takes a weird sense of pleasure in the darker stuff." Which O'Connell revels in.



'Misogyny is a pig-ugly trait': Jack wears mustard shirt by basicrights.com, brown trousers by Sefr at matchesfashion.com, watch by jaeger-lecoultre.com and shoes by grenson.com. Photograph: Jason Hetherington/The Observer

"With any actor, you try to work out what they need from you as a director," Haigh tells me. "Some actors want to be looked after, others want to be pushed. Jack wants to be hurled into the air without a crash mat. If I am something of a sadist for sending us up to the freezing Arctic in the pursuit of authenticity, then he's undoubtedly a masochist when it comes to crafting his performance. He is so deeply committed to finding the gnarly truth of a moment." Preparing for scenes, Haigh would watch O'Connell retch and swear and howl. "I remember once trying to persuade him that he didn't need to throw up for real. He was having none of it." He adds, "I think Jack was interested in playing someone actively questioning how to live among men rather than blindly following, a man trying to break free from the constraints of traditional masculinity."

Colin Farrell plays Sumner's sociopathic counterpart, a hulking harpooner called Drax – a man who enjoys a kill and moves among the crew like a violent bear; the two men are drawn to each other, despite themselves. Farrell poured himself into the character, bulking up on multiple breakfasts, sleeping on the replica ship, not washing for weeks. “And you didn’t even get to experience his smell. The smell of man it was.” He chuckles darkly. “Notes of cheeseburger.”

One of the things O’Connell has learned in his half a life of acting is that, if he’s lucky, he can walk away from a project with more than just a paycheque. “Remember, I didn’t experience higher education, so any role that I play is a gateway – this was a gateway into reading the *Iliad* and philosophy. Stuff I wouldn’t have found if I was still milling about Derby. It’s made me want to go back to school. I’m going to study history.” What would he be doing if he wasn’t doing this? “Honestly, nothing good.”



‘Thank you, I feel “seen”’. Jack O’Connell as Patrick Sumner in *The North Water*. Photograph: Nicolas Bolduc/BBC/See-Saw Films

It’s this knowledge that means, when he’s not working, he likes to play golf. “Likes” is perhaps not the correct word. He does it so the time off doesn’t pull him under. “You’ve got no choice with golf but to be there for three hours. I’ve taken it up in a big way because it’s long and you’re outdoors,

and it fills time, which, you know, is good for me. The devil makes work for idle hands.”

Then his juice is gone and suddenly we’re talking about men again, and he’s worried he’s going to be misunderstood. The conversation slows, from a jaunty sprint to an awkward plod, as though we’re walking through treacle. “I’m wanting to ask you to look after me here, you know,” he says. “I wish we could have a better conversation about this, but it’s so easy to sound like you’re fighting for the other side...” I’m not trying to set him up, I promise. I want to talk about masculinity from the perspective of a man who has spent his career going to physical extremes to show the vulnerability of violent men, and how what it means to be a man has changed since he was growing up. “Right,” he says. “Cook worked at the time because laddishness was part of his world – we were watching *Booze Britain* and *Geordie Shore*. I wonder what that character would look like today. Thank you for that thoughtful summation of my career. I feel ‘seen’. But it’s so... quizzical. Your own identity is one of the most challenging things to understand. As a man, you have your own power and agency, and it’s about learning where that is beneficial, and where it’s poisonous. That’s not a phenomenon that’s particular to men though; we’re all trying to work out what our meaning is aren’t we? And we’re all fallible.” He picks at his uneaten avocado thoughtfully. “I’m trying to listen more. I’m trying to be better.”

The North Water slows into a more existential horror story as the episodes pass, and Sumner must find increasingly extreme ways to stay alive on the ice. I ask O’Connell about a scene steeped in pain and madness, where, having killed a polar bear he climbs into her warm guts and lies inside its skin waiting for death. “I have no prior experience obviously, of being devoured,” he says, sensibly, “So I just thought, OK,” and he raises his eyes, his brow set with a familiar gravity, “Let’s make this sexy.” And then he cracks up.

The North Water will premiere on BBC Two and BBC iPlayer on 10 September at 9.30pm

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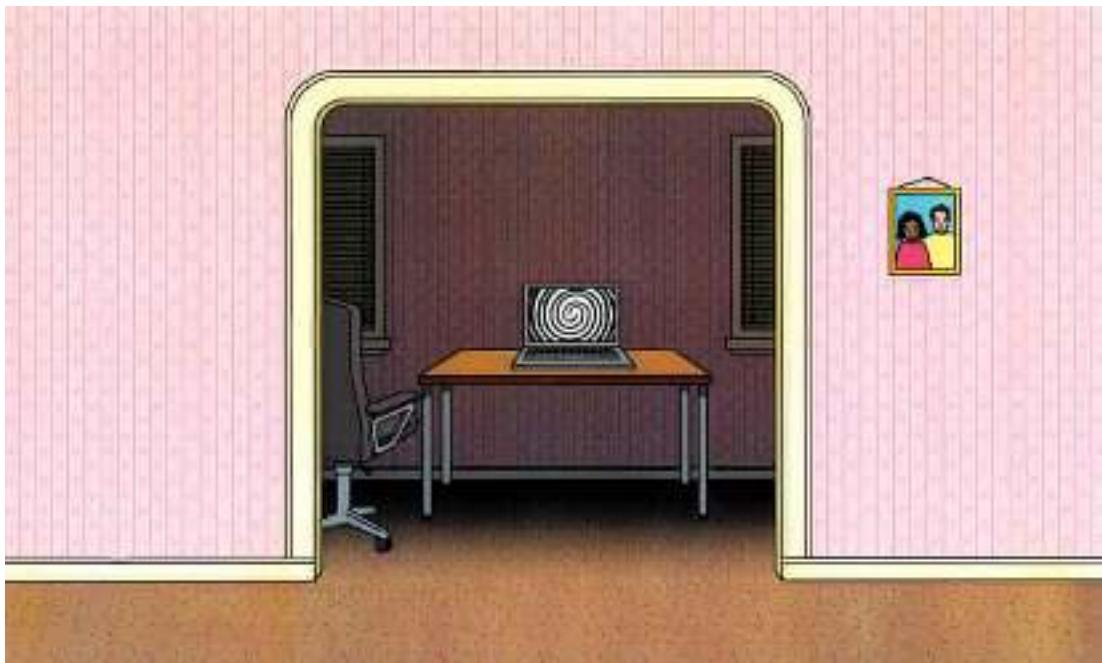
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[Pornography](#)

‘Sex isn’t difficult any more’: the men who are quitting watching porn



‘If people think about who they are at their best, they’ll usually say it’s when they’re porn-free’ ... Jack Jenkins, the founder of Remojo. Illustration: George Wylesol at Heart/The Guardian

[Simon Usborne](#)

Mon 6 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

Thomas discovered pornography in the traditional way: at school. He remembers classmates talking about it in the playground and showing each other videos on their phones during sleepovers. He was 13 and thought it was “a laugh”. Then he began watching pornography alone on his tablet in his room. What started as occasional use, at the beginning of puberty, became a daily habit.

Thomas (not his real name), who is in his early 20s, lived with one of his parents, who he says did not care what he was doing online. “At the time, it felt normal, but looking back I can see that it got out of hand quite quickly,” Thomas says. When he got a girlfriend at 16, he started having sex and watched less pornography. But the addiction was just waiting to resurface, he says.

During the first UK lockdown last year, Thomas lost his job. He was living with older relatives and trying to protect them from Covid while becoming increasingly stressed about money. He was spending hours online, where the pornography streaming sites had found a rising demand from people stuck inside.

“It became daily again,” he says of his habit. “And I think about 80% of my mental downfall was because of porn.” Thomas began seeking out more explicit content and became withdrawn and miserable. His self-esteem plummeted as shame consumed him. Did he ever feel suicidal? “Yeah, I did get to that point,” he says. “That’s when I went to see my GP. I thought: I can’t sit in my room and do nothing; I need help.”

The shame stopped Thomas from mentioning pornography to the doctor, who prescribed antidepressants. They improved his mood, but not his habit, which was starting to breed mistrust in his relationship and affect his sex life. He began to think other men must be trapped in the same cycle. “So I just Googled something like ‘How to stop watching porn’ and there was so much,” he says.

The debate about pornography is focused on the supply end of a multibillion-pound industry – and the fraught business of keeping it out of children’s bedrooms. In its darkest corners, pornography has been shown to trade on sex trafficking, rape, stolen imagery and exploitation, including of children. It can also pervert expectations of body image and sexual behaviour, with frequent depictions of violence and degrading acts, typically against women. And it has become almost as available as tap water.

[Plans by the UK government to force pornography sites to introduce age verification collapsed in 2019](#) due to technical struggles and the concerns of privacy campaigners. The UK still hopes to introduce some form of regulation. In the meantime, it is up to parents to enable their internet provider’s filters and hope their children are not accessing pornography outside their home.



‘Because there are consumers, there are pimps, traffickers and corporate criminals’ ... Laila Mickelwait, the founder of the Justice Defense Fund.
Photograph: Image supplied by Laila Mickelwait

The market is dominated by MindGeek, [a Canadian company that owns sites including YouPorn and Pornhub](#). The latter, which says it gets 130m daily visitors, [reported an immediate spike in traffic of more than 20%](#) in March last year. The pandemic also triggered a rush of adult content at OnlyFans, a

UK-based platform where many people sell homemade pornography (last month, [OnlyFans scrapped plans to ban explicit content](#) after an outcry among its users).

The result, say pornography campaigners and a small but growing network of specialist therapists, is a rise in problematic use, particularly among men who grew up in the age of high-speed broadband. They say casual consumption can escalate, leading users to seek out more extreme content to satisfy their urges. They blame pornography for contributing to depression, [erectile dysfunction](#) and relationship issues. Those who seek help often find their problems are misunderstood. Sometimes, they stumble into a fast-evolving world of online advice that has itself become controversial. It includes moral abstinence programmes with religious overtones – and a fierce debate about whether pornography addiction even exists.

Yet, by tackling compulsive consumption, anti-pornography campaigners hope to check some of pornography's toxic effects. "It's a demand-driven industry ... because there are consumers, there are pimps, traffickers and corporate criminals who are using the filmed sexual abuse of women, girls, men and boys to produce nonconsensual content that is being consumed for massive profit," says Laila Mickelwait, the founder of the US-based [Justice Defense Fund](#), which fights sexual exploitation online.

Jack Jenkins was never hooked on pornography, but he was typical in discovering it via school friends at 13. Research by the British Board of Film Classification in 2019 suggested [51% of children aged 11 to 13 had seen pornography, rising to 66% of 14- to 15-year-olds](#). (The figures, from an online survey of families, are likely to be an underestimate.) Much later, Jenkins, 31, was exploring Buddhist meditation when he felt like ridding himself of unhealthy diversions, including pornography. "It was just something I didn't want in my life any more," he says.

Jenkins was also an entrepreneur – and spied an opportunity. He spent hours doing market research on forums, including Reddit, where people discuss problematic pornography use of varying degrees, from his own level up to "full-blown addicts who are watching it for 10 hours a day". They had all

felt uncomfortable sharing their problem, or had been judged while seeking help via traditional addiction or mental health services.

I think if there had been a web filter when I was 13, I'd be married with kids now and not having this conversation

James

So Jenkins built [Remojo](#), which claims to be “the world’s only complete program for blocking and quitting porn”. For a fee, it offers technology that is designed to be almost impossible to bypass. It works across all of a user’s devices to block not only pornography sites, but sexual content on social media and elsewhere. Remojo also has a growing pool of content, including podcast interviews, guided meditation and an anonymous online community. “Accountability partners” can be alerted automatically to potential relapses.

Since a soft launch in September 2020, Jenkins says more than 100,000 people have installed Remojo, now at a rate of more than 1,200 a day. The company, which employs 15 people in London and the US, has attracted £900,000 in funding from eight investors.

Jenkins estimates that more than 90% of his customers are male, including many from more religious countries than the UK, such as the US, Brazil and India. There are new fathers and men like him who are into personal growth. Remojo, which costs from \$3.99 (about £2.90) a month, is not anti-pornography, anti-masturbation or morally driven, Jenkins says. “But the fact is, if people sit down and think about who they are at their best, they’ll usually say it’s when they’re porn-free.”

By the time Thomas hit Google in May of this year, he was less socially isolated and had found another job. He was no longer suicidal, but he remained hooked on pornography. When he searched for help, Remojo popped up. He downloaded it and waited to see what would happen.

Paula Hall, a veteran psychotherapist who specialises in sex and pornography addiction, started working with drug addicts in the 90s before changing course. She had noticed a shift in attitudes towards sex addiction. “It used to be seen as a celebrity issue,” she says from [the Laurel Centre](#), her

firm of 20 therapists in London and Warwickshire. “It was rich, powerful men who had money to pay sex workers.” Fifteen years ago, few of Hall’s clients even mentioned pornography as an outlet for addiction. Then came high-speed internet. “Now, it’s probably 75% for whom it’s purely porn.”

Enquiries went up more than 30% in the year after the start of the pandemic; Hall recruited five new therapists. They see almost 300 clients a month. “We’re seeing people for whom therapy is very much what is needed,” she says. “Addictions are a symptom – a coping or numbing mechanism.”



‘We must educate’ ... Paula Hall, the founder of the Laurel Centre.
Photograph: Courtesy of Dr Paula Hall

Hall’s work involves finding and talking about the root cause of the problem and then rebuilding a healthy relationship with sex. It is not, she says, about abstinence. Many of the more puritanical areas of the wider pornography addiction community promote quitting masturbation entirely. This includes elements of NoFap, a “pornography recovery” movement that began as a Reddit forum 10 years ago. (Fap is a slang word for masturbation, although NoFap.com now says it is not anti-masturbation.)

NoFap and the wider pornography addiction community are in a battle against pro-pornography activists and elements of the pornography industry.

Religion appears to underpin some of the forces on both sides. (Mickelwait, of the Justice Defense Fund, was formerly the director of abolition at Exodus Cry, a Christian activist group that campaigns against exploitation in the sex industry.) Among their disputes is the existence of addiction. However, in 2018, the World Health Organization classified compulsive sexual behaviour as a mental health disorder, bringing it in line with compulsive gambling.

Several studies have looked at the effects of pornography on the brain. Some have suggested that it triggers [greater feelings of desire, but not enjoyment](#), in compulsive users – a characteristic of addiction. Others have indicated that [the brain's reward system is smaller in regular pornography consumers](#), meaning they might need more graphic material to get aroused. “Ultimately, it doesn’t matter what it’s called, because it’s a problem,” Hall says. She has seen men who pace the room and can’t think of anything else until they get a fix of pornography: “They get the jitters.”

James (not his real name) is in his early 30s and, like Thomas, discovered pornography at 13. “My parents hated each other and I’d hide upstairs on my computer,” he says. “Porn was a numbing tool for any sort of negative emotion I had.”

James tried to get help at university, when using pornography to ease the pressure of deadlines only further stole his time, harming his studies. He found a relationship counsellor. “I was gearing up to talk about my porn addiction for the first time ever, and I was really nervous, and the woman was like: ‘Why don’t you just stop watching it?’ She was so dismissive.”

The experience put James off finding help until he was 25, when huge work stress tipped him towards his lowest point. “I pretty much realised I was consuming porn at a higher rate than the internet was able to produce it,” he says. His habit had ruined two serious relationships. “It’s just soul-destroying to have this insatiable appetite for porn when you’re feeling horrible, but nothing when you’re feeling good in a relationship.”

I think about 80% of my mental downfall was because of porn

Thomas

Before meeting Hall two years ago, James was offered cognitive behavioural therapy with someone who had no idea about addiction. He went down the sex addiction route, but hated a 12-step programme that he says was based around shame and a “higher power”.

Hall dealt first with the resentment and anger James felt towards his parents. “Then it was about relearning to have sex again,” he says. He began to sort behaviours into three concentric circles. The inner circle contained pornography and was off-limits. An “at-risk” middle circle included certain non-pornographic yet vaguely sexual TV shows and websites. “The outer circle is behaviours that are good and helpful and that I should be doing, like phoning my family and going to addiction meetings,” he says.

Talking to other addicts has been an important substitute coping strategy for James. He uses pornography a lot less now, but even after three years he has found it tough to quit. “You can physically separate yourself from alcohol or drugs, but you can’t separate yourself from your own sexuality,” he says. “But at least now I understand it and can see a route out. There used to be a permanence that was so isolating.”

Hall says about 95% of inquiries at the Laurel Centre come from men – and that most women who get in touch are worried about their partners. She believes women represent a significant proportion of problematic users, but thinks female sex addicts face an even bigger shame barrier, because they expect to be seen as “sluts or bad mothers”. Yet she says the same gender politics leave men emotionally unmoored and their problems unappreciated.

“We bring up girls to be bastions of sexual safety – ‘Don’t get an STI, don’t get pregnant, don’t get a reputation’,” she says. “We bring up lads not to get girls pregnant and to look after girls’ feelings.” In doing so, Hall says, “we split men’s emotions from sexuality at a young age, whereas with women we separate their desire from their sexuality – and we wonder why we have a problem”.

Hall promotes better sex and relationships education, plus improved access to help for people who develop a problem. She also believes in age verification. But even if governments devise something that works, Hall

adds, “we must accept that a determined child will always find a way of beating the system, which is why we must educate as well”.

Thomas and James also believe in tougher regulation. “I often think that if there had been a filter on the internet when I was 13, I’d be married with kids now and not having this conversation,” says James. Remojo’s Jenkins says: “Kids can’t be held responsible for interacting with this content. It’s disgraceful that we accept the situation as it is.”

When I speak to Thomas, his Remojo app tells him that he has been pornography-free for 57 days. He says he has been stunned by the results. Blocking pornography rather than getting therapy appears to be working for him. On the day he downloaded Remojo, Thomas got his girlfriend to create and keep secret a passcode that would be needed to change any of the blocker’s settings. He thinks he is 80% free of his problem and feels the urge to seek out pornography only once every other week or so. “Sex isn’t difficult any more and my girlfriend is able to trust me again,” he says. “It probably sounds cringey to say it, but I’m a hell of a lot less depressed now and it feels like I have control of my life again.”

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at befrienders.org.

This article was amended on 7 September 2021 to clarify the description of the three circles system sometimes used by addicts.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/sep/06/sex-isnt-difficult-any-more-the-men-who-are-quitting-watching-porn>

Indigenous child graves

‘Cultural genocide’: the shameful history of Canada’s residential schools – mapped

[Antonio Voce](#), [Leyland Cecco](#) and [Chris Michael](#)

Mon 6 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

In May, Canadians were shocked at the discovery of the remains of 215 children at the site of a former school in British Columbia. The bodies belonged to Indigenous children, some believed to be as young as three years old, who went through Canada’s state-sponsored “residential school” system. The schools, scattered across the country, were aimed at eradicating the culture and languages of the country’s Indigenous populations.

The findings have brought the world’s renewed attention to this shameful chapter of Canadian history, left deep wounds in hundreds of communities and sparked fresh demands for justice aimed at the Canadian government and the churches that ran the schools for decades.

Native land claims

School closed after

1990

1960

1930

1890

Hover map for details

Unmarked graves sites

confirmed

investigation

Hover map for details



Cambiar
Astoria -











Camborne
Kootenay -









Denomination:

Location:

Reported:

Discovered:

In 2015, the truth and reconciliation commission, which collected thousands of hours of testimony from survivors, determined that the residential school systems had amounted to a “cultural genocide” of Indigenous people. The federal government formally apologised for the schools in 2008, but the recent discoveries of graves have prompted calls for an independent investigation, including the possibility of criminal charges against the government and the Catholic church.

The prime minister, Justin Trudeau, has pledged to take “concrete action” to help Indigenous communities in their searches, but the costs are expected to far exceed money offered by the government. A previous request of \$1.5m in funding to search for the graves was denied by the federal government in 2009. Meanwhile, as the searches continue, the number of unmarked graves – and those who died attending the schools – is only expected to rise.

Sources and methodology

Indian residential schools dataset: [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba](#)

Native land claims dataset: [native-land.ca](#)

Historical Treaties dataset: [canada.ca](#)

St Eugene mission pictures: [Indian Residential School History & Dialogue Centre](#)

Journey animations are based on survivors' testimonies; the Guardian reconstructed the journeys using Google Maps. Distances provided are approximate

This article was amended on 8 September 2021. The earlier version erroneously included the Peace and Friendship Treaties and the Douglas Treaties among the Numbered Treaties.

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From Mansfield Park to Mojo: why Harold Pinter's acting deserves to be celebrated



The playing's the thing ... Frances O'Connor and Harold Pinter in Mansfield Park. Photograph: AF archive/Alamy

[Ryan Gilbey](#)

Mon 6 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

Like an unhurried but dependable butler, *The Servant* is here again. It was only nine years ago that Joseph Losey's crackling psychological drama, about the shifting power games between a toff (James Fox) and his manservant (Dirk Bogarde), was last doing the rounds in cinemas. But this is not a film that ever gets old.

First released in 1963, its influence persists today: Bong Joon-ho's Oscar-winning *Parasite* shares its alertness to class tensions and creeping moral corruption, a cuckoo-in-the-nest scenario and lighting to die for. Harold Pinter's script, the first of his tremendous trilogy for Losey (followed by *Accident* and *The Go-Between*), represents an X-ray of the English class system. Of course, "Pinter In 'Writes Brilliant Screenplay' Shock!" is nobody's idea of a marmalade-dropper. Less widely acknowledged is the playwright's command as a screen actor, which only became clear later. In the all-time-great 1987 BBC version of his play [The Birthday Party](#), for instance, Pinter is extraordinary as the intimidating Goldberg, who makes life very sticky indeed for poor Stanley (Kenneth Cranham), the lone, twitchy guest at a seaside boarding house.

There is a special thrill to seeing him sink his gnashers into his own material – but he didn't just soar in his self-penned work. He is superb, too, as Sir Thomas Bertram in the 1999 adaptation of *Mansfield Park* by Canadian writer-director Patricia Rozema. Taking liberties with Jane Austen's text, she foregrounds the horrors of slavery from which Sir Thomas has profited, and has him cast a faintly lecherous eye over his own niece, Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor). These touches are more than justified by the grave authority of Pinter's performance.

He was never better, though, than in Jez Butterworth's 1997 film version of his own Pinter-esque hit play [Mojo](#), set among feuding mobsters in the rock'n'roll clubs of late-50s Soho. On stage, crime kingpin Sam Ross was feared but never seen. In the movie, Pinter's Ross leaves an indelible

impression: a vulture-like paedophile cosied up to his defenceless prey, the skinny teen rocker Silver Johnny (Hans Matheson).

Critics were lukewarm about the film; even Butterworth sensed it. “On set I was always thinking: ‘I’m sure this isn’t the most exciting thing we could be filming right now,’” he recalled. Pinter’s big scene was the exception. “That was the penultimate day of shooting, and it was the first thing that really worked.” Matheson felt the same. “The film was OK. Not rubbish-rubbish. But that scene was outrageous and naughty.” Its distillation of power, privilege and menace could almost have come directly from *The Servant*. One thing is indisputable: Pinter was nobody’s butler. But he knew how to serve the text.

The Servant is in cinemas from Friday 10 September

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/sep/06/from-mansfield-park-to-mojo-why-harold-pinters-acting-deserves-to-be-celebrated>

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Vaccines and immunisation

Children could override parents' decision on vaccines, says Zahawi



The JCVI's advice against extending the vaccine offer to children is likely to be overruled by the UK's chief medical officers. Photograph: Peter Lopeman/Alamy

*[Jessica Elgot](#) Chief political correspondent
[@jessicaelgot](#)*

Sun 5 Sep 2021 10.41 EDT

Healthy 12- to 15-year-olds could override their parents' decision on vaccination in the right circumstances, a minister has said, as the UK government prepares to overrule advice and extend jabs to younger teens.

Nadhim Zahawi, the vaccines minister, said parents of healthy 12- to 15-year-olds would be asked for consent if coronavirus jabs were approved for their children – expected to be pushed through by ministers this week.

But he added that children could override their parents' wishes "if they're deemed to be competent to make that decision, with all the information available".

He told Times Radio: "What you essentially do is make sure that the clinicians discuss this with the parents, with the teenager, and if they are then deemed to be able to make a decision that is competent, then that decision will go in the favour of what the teenager decides to do."

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) decided against backing the move to extend the vaccine offer to younger teens on health grounds alone, since Covid-19 presents such a low risk to that age bracket. However, that decision is likely to be overruled by the UK's chief medical officers, who will take wider considerations into account – such as disruption to education.

Prof Peter Openshaw, a member of the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) which advises the government, told BBC Breakfast he was "a little surprised" at the JCVI's decision.

"We do know the virus is circulating very widely amongst this age group, and that if we're going to be able to get the rates down and also prevent further surges of infection perhaps later in the winter, then this is the group that needs to become immune," he said.

"And the best way to become immune is through vaccination, and there's never been as much information as this in the past. To think there hasn't been enough research is completely wrong."

Zahawi said no final decision had been made. "We have not made any decisions, so we haven't decided not to listen to the experts," he said.

"On the contrary, all four ministers, the secretary of state [for health] Sajid Javid and his fellow ministers in the devolved administrations have agreed to ask the chief medical officers to convene expert groups, including the JCVI being in that, to be able to recommend which way we should go on healthy 12- to 15-year-olds."

Zahawi also confirmed vaccine passports will be required for nightclubs, mass events and large venues in [England](#) by the end of September, the vaccines minister has confirmed, saying that would allow businesses to stay open during the winter months if Covid-19 surges.

He said the government wanted to “make sure the whole economy remains open” through the autumn amid fears that a return to school could set off a new wave of infections.

“We are looking at, by the end of September when everyone has had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated, for the large venues, venues that could end up causing a real spike in infections, where we need to use the certification process,” Zahawi told Sky’s Trevor Phillips on Sunday.

“If you look at what the FA have done, they’ve done so brilliantly in terms of checking vaccine status to reopen football. That is the sort of right thing to do and we are absolutely on track to continue to make sure that we do that.”

Vaccine passports, which can be shown via the NHS app, have been fiercely opposed by some Conservative MPs. But Zahawi said Boris Johnson was committed to the plan.

“The reason being is that, I, as does the prime minister, want to make sure the whole economy remains open,” he said. “The worst thing we can do for those venues is to have a sort of open-shut-open-shut strategy because we see infection rates rise because of the close interaction of people, that’s how the virus spreads, if people are in close spaces in large numbers we see spikes appearing.

“The best thing to do then is to work with the industry to make sure that they can open safely and sustainably in the long term, and the best way to do that is to check vaccine status.”

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Biden administration

US officials optimistic Covid booster rollout will start on 20 September



Dr Anthony Fauci: 'The bottom line is, very likely at least part of the plan will be implemented, but ultimately the entire plan will be.' Photograph: John Locher/AP

[Victoria Bekiempis](#) in New York

Sun 5 Sep 2021 12.11 EDT

US officials have expressed optimism that Covid-19 booster shot delivery can start for all adults on 20 September, the goal set by President Joe Biden, as [cases](#) continue to rage across the country fueled by the highly transmissible Delta variant.

The officials insist, however, that boosters will not be rolled out without US health agencies' authorization, leaving open the possibility of delays.

Dr Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and chief medical adviser to Biden, was asked Sunday on CBS's Face The Nation whether the 20 September goal remained the planned rollout date.

"In some respects, it is. We were hoping that we would get both the candidates, both products, Moderna and Pfizer, rolled out by the week of the 20th. It is conceivable that we will only have one of them out, but the other one will follow soon thereafter," Fauci said. Pfizer has submitted its data, making it likely to meet this goal, Fauci said; Moderna [announced](#) that it has started submitting data.

"The bottom line is, very likely at least part of the plan will be implemented, but ultimately the entire plan will be."

"We're not going to do anything unless it gets the appropriate FDA regulatory approval, and then the recommendation from the [CDC] advisory committee," Fauci also said, explaining that he expects any possible delay with Moderna would be "at most" a few weeks.

As almost all Covid-19 infections in the US are caused by the Delta variant, officials hope boosters will clamp down on its rapid spread. Covid-19 vaccines do provide incredibly strong protection against illness, hospitalization, and death against Delta, but breakthrough infections are reportedly [rising](#) with this variant.

At present, 53% of the US population is fully vaccinated, and 62% have received at least one dose.

Covid-19 cases have increased 6% in the past week on 4 September, and there has been a 22% increase in deaths over that same period. The seven-day average for cases and deaths over this same period is 163,716 and 1,550, respectively.

The US continues to lead the world in Covid-19 cases and deaths, at 39,908,072 confirmed infections and 648,121 known fatalities, according to [Johns Hopkins University data](#). Nearly 95% of US counties have "high"

community transmission, according to the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Fauci's statements come amid questions on Biden's plans for distributing [Covid-19 booster shots](#). Leaders of the CDC and FDA have implored Biden to reconsider his plan to start offering boosters on 20 September, saying they needed more data, [NPR reported](#).

White House chief of staff Ron Klain echoed Fauci's statements Sunday on CNN's State of The Union, saying that 20 September was a projection, not a hard-and-fast date. Klain said that Biden's discussion of booster implementation had always depended on FDA and CDC authorization.

"I think what we said was that we would be ready as of the 20th," Klain said. "I would be absolutely clear, no one's going to get boosters until the FDA says they're approved, until the CDC advisory committee makes a recommendation."

"What we want to do though is be ready as soon as that comes."

Klain also said that the recipients would be determined by FDA and CDC's scientific guidance.

As discussion of booster rollout continues, public health officials and experts have recently expressed concern that Labor Day holiday travel this weekend could worsen the ongoing surge.

"As we head into Labor Day, we should all be concerned about history repeating itself. High or intense transmission around most of the country combined with population mobility with limited masking and social distancing has been a consistent predictor of major surges," Dr John Brownstein, a Boston Children's Hospital epidemiologist, [told ABC News](#).

Data show that holidays can spur dramatic Covid-19 transmission throughout the country. In the weeks preceding Labor Day 2020, average US daily cases dropped to about 38,000. There was a 400 percent increase in daily US cases between Labor Day weekend and Thanksgiving of 2020,

however, resulting in record high deaths and hospitalizations, ABC News said.

Dr Rochelle Walensky, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC) director, said Tuesday during the White House Covid-19 briefing: “First and foremost, if you are unvaccinated, we would recommend not traveling.”

“Throughout the pandemic, we have seen that the vast majority of transmission takes place among unvaccinated people in closed, indoor settings,” Walensky also said.

Jeff Zients, White House Covid-19 response coordinator, similarly commented during this briefing: “We need more individuals to step up, as people across the country prepare for Labor Day weekend. It’s critical that being vaccinated is part of their pre-holiday checklist.”

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Supply chain crisis

Wagamama struggling to find chefs at a fifth of its UK sites



Chief executive Thomas Heier said the pan-Asian restaurant chain has staff shortages at 30 of its 147 sites. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

[Jasper Jolly](#)

[@jjpjolly](#)

Sun 5 Sep 2021 19.01 EDT

The boss of Wagamama has said the restaurant chain is struggling to hire chefs at a fifth of its sites, as companies across the economy warn of recruitment difficulties.

The end of most coronavirus pandemic restrictions in the UK has led to a [bounce back in demand for the hospitality industry](#), which was among the hardest-hit sectors. However, many restaurants, bars and hotels are struggling to find enough workers to fill roles.

Wagamama, which serves pan-Asian food, has been hit by shortages of staff from Europe following [Brexit immigration restrictions](#), its chief executive, Thomas Heier, told the Press Association, with difficulties at 30 of its 147 sites.

“We’ve seen a reduction in our EU workforce in particular,” Heier said, “but the other thing we’re seeing is increased competition from logistics and delivery firms who are struggling with an increased number of vacancies.”

UKHospitality, an industry lobby group, has described the shortage of staff as “critical”. Data from the Office for National Statistics showed that there was a 10% vacancy rate in the hospitality sector, equivalent to 210,000 roles.

Ratings agency Fitch last week said the movement of workers out of the UK back to the EU had been “intensified by Brexit”. It added that European employers were facing similar challenges, although freedom of movement between EU countries coupled with higher unemployment meant the problems were less acute.

Wagamama, which is part of The [Restaurant Group](#), the owner of Garfunkel’s and Chiquito among other brands, also reported unseasonally high demand. While UK domestic restrictions on movement and socialising have been lifted, travel abroad to many popular destinations is still restricted, meaning that spending has been directed elsewhere.

“It’s a perfect storm of higher than normal demand, with supply chain challenges in the mix and a shortage of staff on the logistics side,” said Heier.

Food prices could also rise, Heier said. “I don’t think we or anyone else are out of the water yet.”

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2021.09.06 - Opinion

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- For Afghan refugees Britain's warm welcome will soon become cold comfort
- I find being a cartoonist exhausting, so imagine having a real job in a pandemic!
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[Opinion](#)[Mark Drakeford](#)

Mark Drakeford – the anti-Boris Johnson who surprised us all

[Richard Wyn Jones](#)



‘The quiet, cerebral approach has stood Mark Drakeford in good stead.’
Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

Mon 6 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

There is a strong argument that the British politician whose reputation has been most enhanced by the challenges of the past 18 months is [Mark Drakeford](#).

Despite having played a prominent role in devolved [Welsh politics](#) for almost two decades before that, at the time of his elevation to the role of Welsh Labour leader and first minister in December 2018, this unassuming west Welshman remained largely unknown to the public. Even a year later, the

low profile accorded to him in his party's 2019 general election campaign suggests he was not regarded as an electoral asset.

Given that this election saw [Labour](#) lose a swath of seats in Wales, it is hardly surprising there was a widespread perception at the time that the next devolved election was likely to prove particularly tough for the country's long-dominant political force. Whatever his other qualities, Drakeford was not a charismatic leader in the mould of his immediate predecessors, Carwyn Jones and Rhodri Morgan.

Since then, however, Covid has changed everything. While Drakeford's detail-oriented, carefully considered approach to policy may not excite, it turns out that, when the going got tough, this was *exactly* what most of the Welsh electorate wanted from their political leader. As a result, the Welsh first minister – in so many ways the anti-Boris Johnson – has become something of a cult figure. Even hard-nosed colleagues speak in tones of genuine wonder at the warmth of the reception he is now afforded. Indeed, apart from the anti-devolutionists and anti-vaxxers, it is striking how few in [Wales](#) seem to perceive him negatively.

Unsurprisingly, May's Senedd election campaign saw Welsh Labour making the most of Drakeford's popularity and increased profile. The reward was yet another [emphatic victory](#). Both Plaid Cymru and a generously resourced and initially very confident Welsh Conservative campaign were humbled – the latter in large part because of the way that leave-voting former Labour supporters were persuaded to return “home”.

Given that the wider Labour party is currently so short on success stories and, in particular, is failing to attract back leave voters, it may seem surprising that it continues to make so little of Drakeford. No doubt it is in part a reflection of a general lack of interest in, or knowledge of, Wales: Observer columnist Andrew Rawnsley once reported that, in Blair's Downing Street, Wales was regarded as “[Scotland's smaller, uglier sister](#)”. Even with Scottish Labour now a wan shadow of its former self, this prioritisation still holds true.

Neither does Drakeford fit comfortably into the dominant narratives on either side of Labour's right-left schism. The first minister is avowedly on the left: not only did he vote for and support Jeremy Corbyn, but he also always votes left in the party's internal elections. He is even – horror of horrors – an avowed republican. Yet Drakeford is also both an election winner and a highly competent wielder of executive power. No wonder the right-leaning Labour leadership don't seem to know what to make of him.

But then, neither does the left. Not least because Drakeford is the quintessential pragmatic politician, who tends to eschew the grand symbolic gesture and focuses on what he regards as achievable progress, accepting all the messy compromises this entails. As perhaps befits a former professor of social policy, here is also a politician whose focus is almost exclusively on domestic politics. A Corbynite, perhaps, but Drakeford is clearly very different.

Then again, perhaps the first minister is just too Welsh for the British party at large. Since its humiliation at the hands of the Plaid Cymru in the first devolved election in 1999, Welsh Labour's "special sauce" has been its willingness to campaign from a soft nationalist position. The party very deliberately emphasises its Welsh identity, argues that "Welsh values" and "Labour values" are effectively synonymous, and claims only Labour can be relied upon to stand up for Wales.

Since the 2016 referendum, this positioning has taken on a harder edge. With successive Tory administrations having adopted an approach to Brexit that entails significant recentralisation of power in Whitehall, the Welsh Labour government has been increasingly arguing that the UK is in urgent need of fundamental reform. This includes overthrowing traditional notions of parliamentary sovereignty and accepting the right of the UK's four component territories to choose their own futures. While Keir Starmer might talk the talk on "radical federalism", it's far from clear that he would be comfortable walking the walk.

But for Drakeford, this is again as much a matter of pragmatism as it is of principle. Without such reform, he believes, the union will simply not survive. Polls consistently suggest that up to a half of Welsh Labour's

support are now at least “indy curious”, serving as a reminder of how far the tectonic plates have already shifted.

In just a few weeks, Drakeford will celebrate his 67th birthday. He’s already made it clear he will step down as first minister during the current Senedd term, in time for his successor to find their feet before the next devolved election. It is a fair bet that, temperamentally, he would prefer to spend his remaining time in office ensuring that Wales recovers from the pandemic and nudging public policy in more progressive directions.

But questions about the future of the UK after Brexit, compounded by the perversely self-defeating “muscular unionism” of the Johnson government, mean that constitutional questions will inevitably dominate. It remains to be seen how effective the quiet, cerebral approach that has stood Mark Drakeford in good stead over the past 18 months will prove to be in this very different context. But we should now know not to underestimate him.

- Richard Wyn Jones is director of the Wales Governance Centre and dean of public affairs at Cardiff University

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[Opinion](#)[Immigration and asylum](#)

For Afghan refugees Britain's warm welcome will soon become cold comfort

[Nesrine Malik](#)



Home secretary Priti Patel watches as a woman arriving from Afghanistan has her fingerprints taken at Heathrow airport. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Mon 6 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

For a brief moment, it would appear that the UK isn't quite so "full up", as the government launches Operation Warm Welcome to relocate refugees from [Afghanistan](#). As the name – evocative of bold military action in the face of the Taliban's triumph – suggests, this change in attitude is a result of a unique combination of guilt, media attention and a sort of colonial obligation to help those who helped us.

There will be photos of grateful families arriving in the UK, and earnest promises from politicians that Britain will do its part. But soon these headlines will fade; and as Afghanistan recedes from our consciousness, those we have let in will be left to the cold business of building a life in the UK.

In the war movie script of the Taliban's dramatic takeover, the film ends with the British showing compassion and selflessness by saving thousands of lives. But once the credits roll and the audience leaves, no attention will be paid to what comes after the welcome. Refugees will soon find that Britain's generosity extends little further than the point of entry.

What awaits is another trial. In addition to the ravages of relocation, there will be the distress of navigating an immigration system that is cruel and chaotic. Refugees will come up against the intersection of the two most compromised institutions in the country – a punitive [Home Office](#) and underfunded local councils.

Already the cracks are beginning to appear. [About 10,000](#) Afghan refugees are currently housed in quarantine hotels across the UK, with little but the bags they were allowed to carry on to the evacuation flights. The infrastructure that has met them has been – as any refugee, immigrant or asylum seeker in the UK will immediately recognise – [mostly informal](#), voluntary and, in the long term, utterly unsustainable.

A lattice of nongovernmental organisations and volunteers has kept the reception going so far. The Afghan charity the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association, based in west London, has been overwhelmed by requests for basic provisions and legal advice, and arranging foster care for unaccompanied minors. Its founder, Nooralhaq Nasimi, came to the UK as a refugee in 1999 and set up the organisation to help others navigate the challenges he and his family faced. His small team of volunteers is [stretched](#) and on its own. “Unfortunately we didn’t get any support from the council or the government,” he told me.

Once the evacuees are out of quarantine, they will almost certainly run into housing scarcity, bureaucratic holdups and poor translation services, despite the high-profile pledges of funding. For every shortcut the government

manages to make, a barrier is raised. Westminster is constantly [making promises](#) the Home Office can't keep.

Take the decision to give high-risk Afghans resettled in the UK [indefinite leave to remain](#), an open-ended immigration status that allows them to work in the UK and eventually apply for a British passport. Their visas will be processed and fast-tracked [without fees](#); they will be exempt from some of the usual paperwork requirements, and come with exceptional banking privileges allowing refugees to open bank accounts that enable them to work without permanent addresses.

But the system is not joined up in that way, and so applicants will themselves have to ping-pong between bank, employer, Home Office and local council. They will in all probability have to do so from temporary accommodation. Hotel stays will have to be extended until housing stock is secured. “Bridging solutions”, such as military barracks run by [private companies](#), will serve in transition. The first state Afghan evacuees can expect after their arrival is a limbo of waiting.

In this limbo, they will join – despite the immediate political attention and fast-tracking of their entries – the other thousands of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants who roll through the crucible of Britain’s settlement system. In it they will risk harassment from the far right [inside their temporary accommodation](#), and experience deterioration of their [mental health](#), as well as lack of access to healthcare.

The Afghan evacuation had to happen suddenly, but even if there were time, the settlement difficulties would have been inevitable. Years of intentional policy have created an immigration and asylum network that allocates as few resources as possible to those within, from allowing local authorities to [veto Home Office requests](#) to house asylum seekers to shifting the legal load of challenging unjust decisions rejecting settlement on to stretched [charities](#).

The heroics of helping the dispossessed, both on the part of the government and the thousands of British people who are sending in donations, are in sharp contrast to the usual status quo – indifference to the plight of asylum seekers at best, and hostility towards them at worst. The focus on the large

gestures of saving our helpers from the villainous Taliban allows us to see the British as heroes. But some of the moral outrage that triggered that epic effort to help those in desperate need of relief should be directed internally. Saving a life is not enough if it is then sentenced to languish in the purgatory of process. Soon Britain's warm welcome will freeze into a cold reception.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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I find being a cartoonist exhausting, so imagine having a real job in a pandemic!

[First Dog on the Moon](#)



Mon 6 Sep 2021 02.45 EDT

[Cartoon by First Dog on the Moon](#)

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[Opinion](#)[Judaism](#)

You don't have to be Jewish to put on your party hats and choose hope and joy

[Nadine von Cohen](#)



‘Many extended Jewish families across the world will be apart for Rosh Hashanah, some for the second year in a row. Of course, people are experiencing far greater hardships, Covid-induced or otherwise, but the separation will be tough for some nonetheless.’ Photograph: Gomberg/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Mon 6 Sep 2021 01.35 EDT

Monday night is Rosh Hashanah, AKA Jewish new year, and I’ve decided everybody should get in on it. With Covid-19, climate breakdown, climate breakdown denial, terrorism, racism, sexism, homophobia, endless lockdowns and a government steeped in sociopathy making life a collective

nightmare, I invite all non-Jews to put on their party hats and choose hope, joy and honey cake this evening.

Why are we counting down to midnight in early September? It's not because we're bad at time. I mean, we did spend 40 years wandering an objectively small desert, but that just makes us bad at wandering. No, celebrating a new year four months shy of January is a calendar thing.

While most of the world goes by the Gregorian calendar, a few sassy countries do their own thing. Israel uses the Jewish (or Hebrew) calendar, which the global Jewish diaspora heeds for Torah (scriptures) readings, festivals and commemorative days. In the most elementary and potentially flawed explanation, because the Jewish calendar is influenced by both the moon and sun, while the Gregorian only by the sun, these Jewish dates fall on different Gregorian dates every year.

Though religion-wise I'm non-practising and am not a Zionist, I still identify with my culture and many Jewish customs still inform my life. You can take the girl out of the synagogue, et cetera. So, like a lapsed Christian with a Christmas tree, I observe some traditions and rituals to bond with family, honour the dead or eat. Sometimes all at once.

One of these rituals is Rosh Hashanah dinner, mostly because of the food. We light candles, sip wine and say prayers, and then it's customary to indulge in sweet foods for a sweet year; round foods for the cyclical nature of life and the crown of Hashem (God); and sweet round foods for good measure.

Instead of the plaited challah (bread) eaten weekly on Shabbat (the Sabbath), we eat round challahs, some with raisins, and dip them in honey. We also dip apples in honey. Dates and new season fruits are prevalent, especially the triple threat pomegranate for its sweetness, biblical significance and abundance of seeds, representing mitzvahs (good deeds). And no Rosh Hashanah meal is complete without honey cake.

Who doesn't want to chant, shake and lob food?

We eat savoury foods too, such as couscous, carrots, brisket and chard, but they're a bit like culinary beards – mostly there for appearance's sake. Most have dates or honey in them anyway. Apparently, fish heads are also common (news to me), a take on the translation of the Hebrew Rosh Hashanah to “head of the year”, also symbolising fertility and abundance.

There are also non-edible Rosh Hashanah rites, most prominently the sounding of the shofar, a ram's horn used like a bugle that I don't like because of animal cruelty and horrible sounds. It is used for the ensuing High Holy Days or Days of Awe to call people to prayer, remind them to repent and announce the end of the fast (we'll get to that later). Blowing the shofar is considered an honour and a mitzvah, and is traditionally done by men because of course it is.

Tashlich (“to cast”) is one of my favourite of all Jewish rituals, symbolising the casting out of sins and referencing several biblical passages. Performed beside a body of water, preferably open and with fish but there's wriggle room, Tashlich involves saying prayers, shaking clothes and – this bit's optional – throwing bread into the water to cast away sins. Who doesn't want to chant, shake and lob food?

You now have the essential ingredients for celebrating Rosh Hashanah and resetting your mind. The food part should be easy, but if at a loss just dip something in honey and say Shanah Tovah (“Have a good year”) to your cat. I'm sure you can find candles and even surer you've got wine, and if you're not within legal lockdown distance of a body of open water, cast your sins into a sink.

You'll struggle to find a ram's horn by sunset, but I just discovered you can order them on eBay so you'll have no excuse for next year. For tonight, just use a recorder or wine bottle or anything you can blow into for sound. And please don't even think about making resolutions, unless they are to do little and achieve nothing until we're through the worst of this.

Many extended Jewish families across the world will be apart for Rosh Hashanah, some for the second year in a row. Of course, people are experiencing far greater hardships, Covid-induced or otherwise, but the

separation will be tough for some nonetheless. Authorities in Melbourne might want to spot check a certain family from a certain engagement party video, just in case.

If after today you're still vibing [Judaism](#), the Days of Awe go for another 10 days, ending with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. All you have to do is reflect on your behaviour and not eat for 24 hours and all your sins will be wiped from your record. It's like intermittent fasting for your soul.

Whether or not you take up my invitation, at least have cake. I recommend [this one](#), with a pinch of ginger, nutmeg and cinnamon. Wishing you and yours Shanah Tovah and the very best for 5782, because we count the years differently too.

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2021.09.06 - Around the world

- [Guinea Soldiers claim to have seized power in coup attempt](#)
- ['Lost generation' Education in quarter of countries at risk of collapse, study warns](#)
- [Australia INXS lead guitarist's loss of finger in boat incident like 'sticking a knife in a toaster', court hears](#)
- [Israel Six Palestinian militants escape from high-security prison](#)
- [China German ambassador to country dies less than two weeks into posting](#)

[Guinea](#)

Guinean soldiers claim to have seized power in coup attempt

01:20

Guinea military unit stages coup, claims to have detained president – video

[Emmanuel Akinwotu](#) West Africa correspondent

Sun 5 Sep 2021 21.25 EDT

An elite army unit has announced it has seized power in the west African country of Guinea, deposed the president, Alpha Condé, and imposed an indefinite curfew.

After heavy gunfire was heard near the presidential palace in the capital, Conakry, on Sunday morning, soldiers announced the country's leadership had been deposed in the latest political upheaval to beset the mineral-rich and impoverished nation.

Col Mamadi Doumbouya, the head of the unit and leader of the apparent coup, sat draped in the country's flag during a brief address on the national broadcaster, Radio Television [Guinea](#), and said the country's parliament and constitution had been suspended and the borders shut.

“We are taking our destiny in our own hands,” he said, further criticising the state of the country under the 83-year-old president. “The personalisation of political life is over. We will no longer entrust politics to one man, we will entrust it to the people.”



A screengrab of video showing the leader of the coup attempt, Mamadi Doumbouya, delivering a speech. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Later on Sunday the soldiers announced a nationwide curfew “until further notice”, saying it would convene Condé’s cabinet ministers at 11:00am (1100 GMT) on Monday.

“Any refusal to attend will be considered a rebellion,” the statement added.

The country’s governors and other top administrators would be replaced by the military, the statement said.

However, there had been some earlier confusion about who was in control of the country.

The defence ministry said an attack on the presidential palace had been put down.

“The presidential guard, supported by the loyalist and republican defence and security forces, contained the threat and repelled the group of assailants,” it said in a statement on Sunday. “Security and combing operations are continuing to restore order and peace.”

The UN secretary general, António Guterres, on Sunday condemned the apparent seizure of power by the military unit. “I strongly condemn any takeover of the government by force of the gun and call for the immediate release of President Alpha Condé,” he said.

The wellbeing of Condé, in power since 2010, has also not been confirmed, but pictures circulating on social media showed soldiers surrounding the president as he leaned back on a sofa in bare feet, in jeans and a partially open shirt and vest.

In the televised address, Doumbouya said elites in the country had mistreated the country and that there would be an 18-month transition period. In videos posted on social media, civilian supporters of the coup were seen hailing soldiers during the city, crying “freedom”.

Unrest had erupted on Sunday morning when residents in Conakry shared videos on social media of military vehicles patrolling the streets.



Video showed Alpha Condé, the president, sitting on a sofa surrounded by soldiers. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Witnesses told Reuters they had seen two civilians with gunshot wounds amid the fighting. “I see groups of soldiers heading towards the presidency. There has been a lot of shooting,” said Ousmane Camara in the central

district of Kaloum, which was deserted and under heavy military presence. There were unconfirmed reports on Sunday of military casualties, and a reporter for Reuters witnessed an ambulance and military convoys approaching the palace vicinity.

Witnesses said soldiers had sealed off the only bridge connecting the mainland to the Kaloum neighbourhood, which houses the presidential palace and most government ministries.

The unrest in Guinea comes less than a year after Condé – a former widely respected activist and veteran opposition figure – won a third term last November, to widespread dismay. Last March, Guinea voted on a controversial referendum approving changes to the constitution, allowing the president to serve a further two terms. The opposition boycotted the referendum and more than 40 people died in violent protests before the vote.

The upheaval in Guinea also comes amid deepening political unrest in west Africa, and fears that democratic gains in many countries are regressing, with a resurgence of third-term bids and attempts to amend constitutions across the region.

In May, a second military coup within a year in Mali brought a young colonel to power in the country beset with jihadist violence, which is rising in the Sahel. Last year, Ivory Coast's president, Alassane Ouattara, won a controversial third term, running for office after previously pledging to step down.

Condé's grip on power has sparked outrage in the mineral-rich coastal nation of 12 million people. The president has overseen a rise in economic growth and development yet Guinea remains highly unequal and impoverished, with much of its young population seeing its future outside of the country.

Last week, Condé sparked further outrage after a bill was passed increasing his salary.

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Global education

‘Lost generation’: education in quarter of countries at risk of collapse, study warns



Pupils on the first day of school in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on October 1, 2020. Photograph: Olympia de Maimont/AFP/Getty

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[Lizzy Davies](#)

Mon 6 Sep 2021 02.01 EDT

The education of hundreds of millions of children is hanging by a thread as a result of an unprecedented intensity of threats including Covid 19 and the climate crisis, a report warned today.

As classrooms across much of the world prepare to reopen after the summer holidays, a quarter of countries – most of them in sub-Saharan Africa – have school systems that are at extreme or high risk of collapse, according to Save the [Children](#).

The UN estimates that, for the first time in history, about 1.5 billion children were out of school during the pandemic, with [at least a third](#) unable to access remote learning.

Now, as much of the developing world faces a combination of interrelated crises including [extreme poverty](#), Covid-19, climate breakdown and intercommunal violence, there are growing fears for a “lost generation of learners”.

In an analysis ranking countries according to their vulnerability, Save the Children found eight countries to have school systems at “extreme risk”, with the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), Nigeria and Somalia deemed most vulnerable, with Afghanistan following closely behind.

The analysis calculated how vulnerable school systems were as a result of a range of factors including coronavirus vaccination coverage, the climate crisis, physical attacks, and the proportion of school-age children with a home internet connection.

It found that a further 40 countries, including Yemen, [Burkina Faso](#), India, the Philippines and Bangladesh, were all at “high risk”.

Gwen Hines, chief executive of Save the Children UK, said: “We already know that it is the poorest children who have suffered the most as a result of Covid-19 school closures. But sadly Covid-19 is just one of the factors putting education – and children’s lives today and tomorrow – under threat.”

She added: “We need to learn from this dreadful experience and act now – but it is simply not good enough to build ‘back’ to how things were. We need to build ‘forward’ and differently, using this as an opportunity for hope and positive change.”



Ahmed Ali Muqbel Ali teaches his children in their tent in Al-Malika camp for displaced people in Taiz, Yemen, after the closure of the schools because of Covid-19. Photograph: Khalid Al-Banna/NRC

As much of the developed world welcomes a return to [more normal schooling](#) this term, more than 100 million children remain out of the classroom in other parts of the world due to nationwide Covid closures in 16 countries, according to Unicef.

It is feared that between 10 and 16 million children are at risk of not returning to school at all, with girls most vulnerable.

Rob Jenkins, global director of education at Unicef, said that even before the pandemic, much of the world had been experiencing a global learning crisis.

“Now we are running a risk of losing a generation of learners,” he warned. “It could have lifelong implications unless we move to catch-up programmes offering full, comprehensive support to children – not just for their learning but also for their mental health, nutritional support [and] a sense of protection.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/sep/06/lost-generation-education-in-quarter-of-countries-at-risk-of-collapse-study-warns>

[Australia news](#)

INXS lead guitarist's loss of finger in boat incident like 'sticking a knife in a toaster', court hears



INXS guitarist Tim Farriss lost a finger in a 2015 boating incident in Sydney's Akuna Bay. Photograph: Don Arnold/Getty Images

Australian Associated Press

Mon 6 Sep 2021 03.43 EDT

The finger-severing accident that INXS's lead guitarist says ended his career and cost him more than \$1.2m has been likened to sticking a knife in a live toaster.

Tim Farriss is suing a [Sydney](#) boat rental company and two boat owners for negligence over a 2015 accident he claims occurred when anchoring equipment unexpectedly moved, causing his left hand to become trapped under the heavy chain.

He also claims he wasn't properly warned about the equipment.

But the musician's story for how his hand ended up trapped didn't add up, the defendants' lawyer contended on Monday, asserting Farriss must have trodden on a deck button that moved the anchor chain back into the boat.

Barrister John Turnbull SC conceded the equipment, which had no guard over the chain, was dangerous but said reasonable care would keep a user out of harm's way.

"I've likened it to a toaster – your toast gets caught in the toaster ... you can't just stick a knife in there, you've got to turn it off," Mr Turnbull said.

He also denied the machine was defective.

But Farriss's lawyer urged Justice Richard Cavanagh to widen his gaze to include the entire boat trip, including Farriss driving into northern Sydney's Akuna Bay on the Australia Day weekend and being unable to find a mooring.

As Farriss dropped anchor, the equipment failed and the musician was left drifting, in wind, on a busy weekend, barrister Adrian Williams said.

"He could not sit and twiddle his thumbs, he didn't have a mooring to go to, he had to do something," he said.

The device was "obviously misaligned", the chain was prone to bunching and the defendants had not taken all steps to maintain their duty of care, despite at least one earlier occasion when the anchor winch failed and had to be operated manually, he said.

"(Mr Farriss) was put in an awful position," Williams said.

"What he has lost is more than a finger. He's lost the ability for his vocation as a performing guitarist. He was not done with that (career) and unsurprisingly, that's had the effect of depressing him ... all for the expense of a small amount of piping and a small amount of machinery."

If successful, Farriss's payout could exceed \$1.2m, primarily because of a claim INXS could have toured six times after 2015.

While the court lightly debated the comeback in the context of Queen, Dexys Midnight Runners, John Farnham and ABBA, Mr Turnbull contended there was doubt INXS would have ever toured again.

"It's the evidence you don't have that rings loudest," he said, pointing to a lack of statements from bandmates Andrew Farriss, John Farriss and Kirk Pengilly on any potential.

"Where are they?"

Cavanagh stressed he'd make a decision on the evidence – not speculation about other rockers' success or failure in revival tours.

He's expected to deliver his judgment in November or December.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/sep/06/inxs-lead-guitarists-loss-of-finger-in-boat-incident-like-sticking-a-knife-in-a-toaster-court-hears>

[Israel](#)

Six Palestinian militants escape from high-security Israeli prison

01:14

Six Palestinian militants escape high-security Israeli prison – video

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Mon 6 Sep 2021 04.25 EDT

Israeli security forces have launched a massive search operation in northern [Israel](#) and the occupied West Bank after six Palestinian prisoners escaped from one of the country's most secure prisons using a rusty spoon in an unprecedented jailbreak.

The six, including five members of Islamic Jihad and a high-profile leader from al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade from Jenin refugee camp, had shared a cell at Gilboa prison and reportedly excavated their escape route behind a sink.

Jailbreaks by Palestinian security prisoners held in Israeli jails are almost unheard of and the profile of the prisoners led Israel's prime minister, [Naftali Bennett](#), to describe it as a “grave incident”.

While initial reports suggested the men had tunneled out, Katy Perry, the commissioner of the Israel prisons service, said the escapers exploited a flaw in the prison's structural design, exposing a gap behind a wall.

“From our initial investigation, it appears that there was no digging; rather, a plate that covered the space was lifted out of place,” said Perry.



A hole in the floor is shown in a picture release by Israel's prisons service.
Photograph: Israeli Prison Services/Reuters

Omer Barlev, Israel's public security minister, suggested the men may have already reached the West Bank after the escape was discovered at 3am on Monday morning.

“There was very precise planning, very detailed, and therefore there was probably external assistance. We’re examining [it] at the moment. We will catch the fugitives.”

Images released after the escape showed a narrow gap in a wall that had been dug out behind a sink, allowing the men to reach the prison’s drainage system.

Officials said they had erected roadblocks and were conducting patrols in the area, while the 400 other prisoners in the jail were being moved to prevent further escape attempts.

Bennett said he was receiving constant updates on the prison break, which occurred hours before Jewish new year celebrations.

The escapers were believed to have been heading for Jenin, where the internationally recognised Palestinian Authority wields little control and

where militants in recent weeks have openly clashed with Israeli forces. Israeli helicopters were seen flying over Jenin on Monday morning.

According to reports in the Israeli media, the prisoners spent several months working on their tunnel using a spoon which they had kept hidden behind a poster in their cell.

The Palestinian Prisoners Club, which represents former and current prisoners, identified the men as ranging in age from 26 to 49 years old.

They include Zakaria Zubeidi, 46, who has been detained since 2019. Zubeidi was a leader in al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, affiliated with the Fatah movement, during the second Palestinian uprising more than 20 years ago. He had been in prison while on trial for two dozen crimes, including attempted murder.

Four of the other prisoners had been serving life sentences, the prisoners' group said. Photos in Israeli media purportedly show the end of the escape tunnel, with one image showing an Israeli security man in a black T-shirt inspecting a hole in the ground.

Palestinian militant groups praised the breakout. "This is a great heroic act, which will cause a severe shock to the Israeli security system and will constitute a severe blow to the army and the entire system in Israel," said Daoud Shehab, a spokesperson for Islamic Jihad.

The Hamas spokesperson, Fawzi Barhoum, said the escape showed "that the struggle for freedom with the occupier is continuous and extended, inside prisons and outside to extract this right".

Gilboa prison was the site of a failed escape attempt in 2014 when a tunnel was found leading from a bathroom, which appears to have exploited the same structural issues used in the latest escape.

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[China](#)

German ambassador to China dies less than two weeks into posting



Angela Merkel with Jan Hecker, who has died at the age of 54, only two weeks after taking up the post of ambassador to China. Photograph: Hayoung Jeon/EPA

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei and [Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

Mon 6 Sep 2021 07.32 EDT

Germany's ambassador to China, Jan Hecker, has died suddenly at the age of 54, less than two weeks into his Beijing posting.

Hecker was a former foreign policy adviser to the German chancellor, [Angela Merkel](#).

“We are deeply saddened and shocked to learn of the sudden death of the German ambassador to [China](#),” a statement on the embassy’s website said.

“Our hearts are with his family and his friends and colleagues at this time.”

A cause of death has not been given. Hecker began his posting in Beijing on 24 August, having arrived earlier that month with his wife and three children, according to German media. Frank Rückert, Hecker’s deputy, would take over his duties for the time being, Deutsche Welle [reported](#).

Hecker had worked with Merkel’s chancellery since 2015, coordinating refugee policy during the European migrant crisis until he was appointed head of the foreign, security and development policy department in 2017.

“I am profoundly shaken by Jan Hecker’s death,” Merkel said in a statement on Monday. “I mourn for a highly valued, longstanding adviser of deep humanity and outstanding expertise.

“I think with gratitude of our work together and am happy to have been so closely tied to him for years. My deepest sympathy goes out to his wife, his children and his other loved ones in their immeasurable grief.”

Hecker was one of Merkel’s top advisers on foreign policy, and his posting to Beijing was seen in Germany as a concerted effort to stabilise relations with China into the post-Merkel era.

Hecker had been an influential player in Merkel’s exclusive inner circle since 2015, when she tasked him with coordinating the country’s response to the refugee crisis. It was largely due to his competence as an organiser that Germany is now seen as having largely lived up to the chancellor’s promise of *Wir schaffen das* (“We will manage”).

In recent years, he was in charge of such sensitive diplomatic missions as the Franco-German-led negotiations between Russia and Ukraine over the conflict in eastern Ukraine. When the US president, Joe Biden, and Chancellor Merkel met for their first in-person bilateral talk at the Cornwall G7 summit this June, photos showed Hecker as one of the only other people at the table.

He had not risen into a position of such power through the conventional diplomatic route but with a background in law: between 2011 and 2015

Hecker was a judge at Germany's federal administrative court.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/06/german-ambassador-to-china-dies-less-than-two-weeks-into-posting-jan-hecker>

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Headlines thursday 9 september 2021

- [Migration Priti Patel's plans to send migrant boats back to France 'dead in water', union says](#)
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Immigration and asylum

Patel's plans to send migrant boats back to France unworkable, union says



A man watches people thought to be migrants being brought to shore in Kent, after being intercepted by an RNLI crew. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 03.49 EDT

[Priti Patel](#)'s plans to send back small boats carrying migrants in the Channel are already "dead in the water", an immigration workers' union has said.

Border Force staff are being trained to employ "turn-around" tactics at sea under plans developed for two years, a statement from the Home Office said overnight.

But Lucy Moreton, professional officer at the Immigration Services Union (ISU) said she would be surprised if the policy, announced as criticism of the government's social care reforms was mounting, was used "even once".

The proposals, which would require maritime law to be rewritten, have already been rejected by the French government.

Moreton told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "In practical terms, if this happens even once, I would be surprised.

"There are understandably a lot of constraints around it and you cannot do this with a vessel that is in any way vulnerable and more importantly you need the consent of the French to do it.

"Because when you turn the vessel back toward [France](#), when it is across the median line it has to be intercepted and rescued by the French and it appears the French will simply not engage with this, in which case it's – if you excuse the pun – dead in the water."

Tim Loughton, a Conservative MP and member of the home affairs select committee, also poured cold water on the prospects of the tactic being used in practice, although supported the underlying principle.

He said: "It sounds good. But I'm afraid in practice it's just not going to happen. These are flimsy boats coming over. Even those that are tougher are completely weighed down.

"Any boat coming up alongside at speed would capsize most of these boats anyway and then we're looking at people getting into trouble in the water and drowning ... and then we'll get blamed for that. It sounds good pushing them back but it's not going to work in practice."

He added: "It's all down to the French. They need to be intercepting them and they need to be better at not allowing them to get into the water in the first place."

In July, Patel agreed to pay the French a further €62.7m (£55m) to fund another clampdown on small-boat crossings of the Channel.

The French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, rejected the proposals on the grounds that “[safeguarding human lives at sea](#) takes priority over considerations of nationality, status and migratory policy”.

He made clear to Patel that the proposals would damage bilateral relations and said French authorities have agreed with the UK to “[double the number of personnel](#) deployed on the Channel coast” and had been offered the use of a UK plane to monitor the waters.

A record 13,500 migrants have crossed the Channel in small boats this year, including at least 1,000 this week.

The headline of this article was amended on 10 September 2021 to remove a quote which was inappropriate in this context.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/09/priti-patels-plans-to-send-migrant-boats-back-to-france-dead-in-water>

UK news

Priti Patel to send boats carrying migrants to UK back across Channel



Migrants claiming to be from Darfur, Sudan crossing the Channel in an inflatable boat near Dover. Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

[Rajeev Syal](#) Home affairs editor

Wed 8 Sep 2021 19.00 EDT

[Priti Patel](#) is preparing to send back small boats carrying migrants in the Channel despite warnings from the French authorities that it could endanger lives.

Border Force staff are being trained to employ “turn-around” tactics at sea under plans developed for two years, a statement from the Home Office said.

It would allow UK officers to force small boats back into French waters. It is unclear if the proposals would include taking migrants back to French

shores.

The proposals have already been rejected by the French government. A letter released on Wednesday showed they could not be accepted by the interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, on the grounds that “safeguarding human lives at sea takes priority over considerations of nationality, status and migratory policy”.

He has warned the UK that employing such tactics “would risk having a negative impact on our cooperation”.

The tactics will be used, the Home Office has said, with the intention of redirecting migrant vessels away from UK waters and back towards [France](#).

Training, which is weather dependent, is due to conclude this month, with use of the tactics ready to deploy as soon as practical and safe.

Border Force has informed ministers they will only be able to deploy the tactics, which have been developed in consultation with maritime experts, when they deem it safe to do so.

Home Office sources said Patel had become “the first home secretary to establish a legal basis for the sea tactics, working with acting attorney general Michael Ellis and expert QCs”.

In a letter released after a bilateral meeting broke up on Wednesday, Darmanin made clear to Patel that the proposals would damage bilateral relations.

“The French position on intervention at sea remains unchanged. Safeguarding human lives at sea takes priority over considerations of nationality, status and migratory policy, out of strict respect for the international maritime law governing search and rescue at sea. With regard to traffic and conditions for crossing the Channel, France has no other solution than to intervene most often on the basis of the provisions in international law governing search and rescue at sea.”

“The use of maritime refoulements [the practice of sending back asylum seekers] to French territorial waters would risk having a negative impact on our cooperation,” he wrote.

Conservative MPs have called for the home secretary to break international law and send all migrants arriving illegally by boat straight back to France.

Darmanin’s letter says that the French authorities have agreed with the UK to “[double the number of personnel](#) deployed on the Channel coast” and had been offered the use of a UK plane to monitor the coast.

Darmanin also rejected a suggestion from the UK to form a single force to stop people smugglers from using boats.

“Coordination between our forces on the coastline is, according to the teams themselves, good and effective. It does not require new structures to be created, as you propose, through a single, joint command centre for the forces.”

Earlier, the Home Office said 785 people crossed the Channel in small boats on Monday, short of last month’s record daily total of 828 migrants.

A record 13,500 migrants have crossed the Channel in small boats this year, including 1,000 in the past two days. Two hundred were prevented from crossing by the French on Monday, when 742 reached the UK.

05:19

How the Covid pandemic has led to more Channel crossings – video explainer

Pierre-Henri Dumont, France’s MP for Calais, said earlier this week that turning around boats would be a blatant breach of human rights laws and an insult to the dignity of those seeking asylum.

“Not giving a chance to children to be protected is something that should not be tolerated in modern society. We are talking about human rights and dignity.

“This suggestion tears apart the UN Geneva conventions giving the right to everyone to apply to any country for asylum.

“The UK left the EU but the UK did not leave the international community and the UN,” he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/09/priti-patel-to-send-boats-carrying-migrants-to-uk-back-across-channel>

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[London](#)

Aaliyah Chen: police have found missing girl, family says



Aaliyah Chen's family say information given to the Metropolitan police was not acted on promptly by the search team

[Vikram Dodd](#) Police and crime correspondent

Thu 9 Sep 2021 11.20 EDT

Police searching for missing teenager Aaliyah Chen have found her in a south London nature reserve, her family have said.

Aaliyah, 15, sneaked out of a window of her family home in Sidcup, south-east London, on Sunday evening and had been missing since.

Police had said she was believed to be with a man aged 24.

Her aunt Laura Rushe said the family were relieved Aaliyah had been found: "It is amazing news, we are all so relieved. After four days [missing] you do

get worried.”

The girl’s family claim police missed the chance to intercept the pair just hours after Aaliyah ran away. They also say police initially misclassified the case as medium risk. The Metropolitan police then said it was being treated as high risk.

Her family had accused police of bungling the search for her. Rushe said: “The first 36 hours felt like they were wasted. Information we provided was not given to the search team.”

On Saturday, the day before Aaliyah ran away, her mother discovered a diary in her bedroom, the family said. It showed she had made plans for running away with the man. She wrote she would starve herself so she would get used to being hungry when she fled home.

Aaliyah had last been seen at home at 9.30pm and by 12.55am is believed to have been on a 51 bus travelling across south London. Her family later discovered she was missing and called the police.

The family allege officers said they would visit addresses linked to the older man at approximately 7.30am on the Monday. At 3pm the same day, when they checked with police, the family claim they were told this had not happened.

Aaliyah was believed to have been at the address in Brixton linked to the man at 8am on the Monday morning. “If they had gone when they were supposed to they may have got them,” Rushe said.

The family said they had to lobby a senior officer in person that evening to have the case upgraded from medium risk to high risk.

Rushe said different officers did not know what evidence and information others had. “Their coordination is appalling, one team did not know the other team had the diaries,” she said. “We have told the Met we will put an official complaint in.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/09/family-of-missing-girl-accuse-met-police-of-bungling-search>

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Social care

Archbishop of Canterbury criticises social care tax rise



The archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) Political correspondent

[@breeallegretti](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 05.12 EDT

Boris Johnson's plan to [increase national insurance](#) contributions to raise £12bn for the NHS and social care could pose a "serious problem" for low-income workers, the archbishop of Canterbury has said.

Justin Welby said privileging wealthy pensioners over the poorest young people was "not a people-centred policy", as he stressed the need for "intergenerational equity".

His comments come after Tory MPs voted through a proposal to raise national insurance contributions (NICs) by 1.25 percentage points through a new ringfenced tax known as the “health and social care levy”.

Under the plan, patients entering the social care system from October 2023 will not have to pay more than £86,000 in their lifetime – excluding food and accommodation. More means-tested support will also be provided for those with assets of between £20,000 and £100,000.

The policy was announced earlier this week and put to a snap vote in the Commons in an attempt to stymie Tory rebels.

Concerns have been raised by the care sector, some Conservative backbenchers and thinktanks that ministers are failing to tackle the issue quickly enough by not implementing the social care changes for two years, and refusing to guarantee that people will not have to sell their home to pay, even when the changes do come into effect. Some say the plan places an unfair burden on poorer workers.

Welby told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that “the question of how you pay for social care, pay for the care of the elderly and particularly the poorest elderly is a really difficult one”.

Asked whether it was right that lower-income workers would pay disproportionately more, given pension and renting income was not covered by the levy, he said: “That is a very serious moral question. If we – as it were – privilege the wealthy older against the poorest younger, that will not work. That’s not a people-centred policy.

“The policy needs to be centred on people and care for the poorest, as well as ensuring that we have an embedded system that will work and is acceptable to all.

“As I say, the test is not just in terms of money, the test is in terms of effectiveness. If it pushes more young people into poverty and means they can’t get their own house and things like that, which I’m aware of from our own children – and ourselves for that matter, because we don’t own our

house in this country – that is going to be a really serious problem, and that is wrong. It needs to be done fairly between the generations – that's part of intergenerational reconciliation.”

Pressed further on whether the proposals were fair, Welby said: “It sounds to me as though there’s a willingness to engage but the detail is going to take a lot of working out, and we’re not there yet.”

He also urged the government – which is facing further spending dilemmas this autumn – to follow the principle of making sure that “the burden is born by those with the broadest shoulders”.

Helen Whately, the care minister, defended the NICs rise, saying: “I don’t want us to raise tax, but we had a really difficult choice here.”

She told Sky News: “We know we desperately need to do social care reform, and governments for decades have not been able to work out the way to fund that, to move that forward. So what we’ve got here is a package that means we can both treat all those people who need treatment under the NHS, and we can embark on those once-in-a-generation social care reforms.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/09/archbishop-of-canterbury-criticises-social-care-tax-rise>

2021.09.09 - Spotlight

- ['Trickster genius' How a divisive Nigerian pastor built a global following](#)
- [Altheia Jones-Lecointe Black Panther who became a Mangrove Nine hero](#)
- [Fossil fuels How much of the world's oil needs to stay in the ground?](#)
- [Time Trumpet The savage cult comedy that 'predicted' the future](#)



TB Joshua in 2015. Photograph: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP/Getty Images

[The long read](#)

From Lagos to Winchester: how a divisive Nigerian pastor built a global following

TB Joshua in 2015. Photograph: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP/Getty Images

by [Matthew McNaught](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

On the second day of TB Joshua's funeral in Lagos, his disciples took to the stage. A microphone was passed around as more than 60 disciples introduced themselves by name and nationality. They came from 18 different countries, among them [Nigeria](#), South Africa, Indonesia, Mexico, the US and the UK. Some seemed barely out of their teens; others were in late middle age, having spent decades serving Joshua, the millionaire Nigerian pastor and self-proclaimed prophet being laid to rest. A senior Nigerian

disciple, recently promoted to prophetess, began her tribute. “How to describe someone so indescribable?” she said. “How to define someone so indefinable? Human and divine?”

Joshua died on 5 June 2021, a few days before his 58th birthday. The news spread on social media, before the Synagogue, Church of All Nations, known as Scoan, made an official announcement. “God has taken His servant Prophet TB Joshua home,” the statement read, “as it should be by divine will.” Over a month later, his funeral under way, there had been no mention of a cause of death.

In a city saturated with megachurches and charismatic pastors, TB Joshua stood out for his global celebrity. He drew huge crowds on his stadium tours across Africa, Asia and Latin America. His satellite channel, Emmanuel TV, was a presence in countless households across sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. Before the pandemic, his church was the biggest international tourist attraction in the country. About 15,000 people would come to Scoan every week.

Some visitors came out of curiosity; many came in desperation, hoping for healing from sickness or deliverance from evil spirits. Politicians came in the hope that Joshua’s blessing might win them favour with the electorate. George Weah, the Liberian football star turned presidential candidate, [took a much-publicised trip](#) to Scoan shortly before winning the 2017 election. The church is based in Ikotun-Egbe, a relatively poor neighbourhood situated amid the urban sprawl of the Lagos Mainland, far from the financial centres of Ikoyi and Victoria Island. Joshua’s fame transformed the area into a thriving commercial hub. Markets, banks, hotels and restaurants rose up to meet demand from visitors.

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What made Joshua unique was not just his international reach, but the intensity of devotion he inspired in his disciples. They called him “Daddy”, kneeling at his feet when greeting him in his office. They accompanied him on international crusades and philanthropic trips. As well as intensive church duties, they spent long hours memorising hundreds of pages of his teachings,

known as Quotable Quotes, which they believed to be the word of God. They lived in dormitories within the church complex. Many of his international disciples came from comfortable, middle-class backgrounds. In following TB Joshua, some had cut themselves off from friends and family, foregoing marriage, education and conventional careers.

“Daddy,” said a senior disciple from Senegal at the funeral, “it was divine destiny that brought all of us to you. We came from different nations, from different backgrounds, with different hearts: unlikely people indeed ...”

When Giles Hurst first heard the news of Joshua’s death, his first feeling was elation. “I remember thinking: ‘This was what VE Day must have felt like,’” he told me on the phone from his home in southern India. “I thought: It’s over. Justice is done. He’s not got away with it.” I told Hurst I was thinking the opposite – he did get away with it, didn’t he? “In this life,” Hurst added. “But I believe he’ll have to answer to God.”

Hurst’s second reaction was an urge to reconnect. After sending Facebook messages to a number of fellow former disciples, he ended up having a long conversation with Mary Winfield*, another British ex-disciple. They hadn’t spoken since Hurst had left Scoan in 2006. In Lagos, their relationship had been fraught. Winfield was, he said, one of the more zealous ones. He remembered being denounced by her in disciple meetings. Now, there was a kinship in their shared experience. They reminisced about life in Scoan, shared news about life since leaving.

A month later, watching disciples speak at the funeral service, Hurst was struck by how many familiar faces he saw. He thought of the experiences he’d had since leaving: five years in the British army, marriage, moving to the Isle of Wight, bringing up three kids. He was now working as a teacher in a Christian residential school in India. It was strange, he said, to think that so many of his old disciple friends had spent those years sleeping in the same dorm, caught up in the endless urgency of disciple life. (Scoan did not respond to my request to comment for this article.)



TB Joshua's body on display during his funeral in Lagos in July.
Photograph: Akintunde Akinleye/EPA

I never met TB Joshua. But for years, he loomed large in my consciousness. I had been writing a book that explored, among other things, the unlikely relationship between Scoan and the church of my childhood, Immanuel: a middle-class, predominantly white evangelical congregation in Winchester, Hampshire. When Joshua died, I was working on the last chapter of the book. In the days that followed, I felt oddly unmoored. It was like nothing I'd known before: no grief, but all the disorientation of a bereavement. The fresh double-take each morning, the small astonishment of every verb pulled into the past tense.

I contacted old friends and interviewees. I spoke to Hurst, as well as Mary Winfield and her brother Dan*, who were old church friends of mine as well as former Scoan disciples. I asked Dan and his wife, Kate*, also an ex-disciple, what they thought would happen next. At first, Dan had hoped that his relatives – several of whom remained devout SCOAN supporters – would finally leave the church. With Joshua gone, he thought, the whole thing might quickly collapse. After Dan and Kate discussed the news with their counsellor, they sobered up. He urged caution. That's not how these things tend to end, he said.

By the second day of the five-day funeral celebration, it was clear that this was not just a laying to rest, but a statement of intent. The last disciple to speak was a blond American woman in her 30s. “Daddy, we will preserve your legacy, we will defend your legacy,” she said. “One chapter in this remarkable journey may have come to an end, but it is not the end, never the end. Prophet TB Joshua lives on.”

TB Joshua first entered my awareness as a curiosity: a sharp-suited Nigerian preacher on the chunky plastic cover of a VHS tape, which sat among books and audio cassettes on the table at the back of the church hall. It was the late 90s and I was in my teens. When I first watched the clips of his healings and exorcisms – which somehow combined Billy Graham’s stadium evangelism with the kinetic drama of WWE wrestling – they provoked, above all, my growing teenage scepticism. But there was also a faint hope, a question hovering: what if this was the real deal? It was the remnant of a familiar anticipatory wonder that soon evaporated entirely.

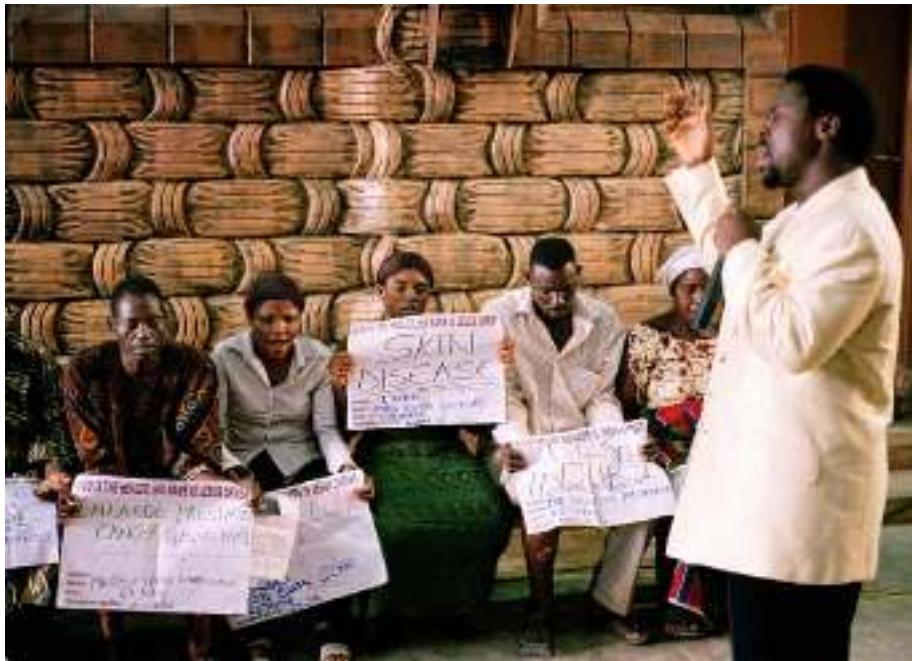
In the years that followed, my aversion to Joshua intensified. He came to personify the toxic, tyrannical potential of the born-again [Christianity](#) I’d left behind. Since I started writing about him, and the confluence of forces that connected him with the church of my childhood, a kind of wonder has returned. Not at the possibility of his anointing, but at his audacity, and the sheer unlikeliness of what he achieved.

It’s hard to disentangle the facts of Joshua’s life from his self-mythologising. The official Scoan narrative is repeated in many online articles: his birth was foretold by a prophet, he spent 15 months in his mother’s womb, he received a divine revelation in 1987 while fasting for 40 days and 40 nights in an area of swampland that would later be called Prayer Mountain.

The basic facts are remarkable enough. Joshua was born into poverty in 1963, in a village called Arigidi in Ondo State, south-west Nigeria. He moved to Lagos as a young man, his secondary school education unfinished, and found work on a poultry farm. He was in his mid-20s when he founded the Synagogue, Church of All Nations. The earliest videos of Scoan show a skinny young man addressing a small congregation under a bamboo tent, wearing a white gown and a long, ragged beard. He barely resembles the

plump-faced, well-groomed millionaire pastor he would become, but his movements are unmistakable: the antic energy, the easy mastery of the crowd.

Joshua was always a controversial and divisive figure. From the 90s onward, he was an outcast from the Nigerian Christian establishment. He was refused membership of the Christian Association and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria for making unorthodox claims about himself (his insistence, for example, that he became a Christian before he was born, during his 15-month gestation). He was criticised for his claims of healing. Aids and cancer were two of his specialities, and he once sent 4,000 bottles of his anointed water to fight the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone. He was [banned from YouTube](#) in early 2021, after complaints about his videos showing him exorcise “demons” of homosexuality. His supporters, on the other hand, often proclaim him as a man of many good deeds, pointing to his philanthropy: he is reported, amongst other things, to have donated large sums of money to repair the electricity infrastructure in his native state.



TB Joshua at the Synagogue, Church of all Nations in 2005. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Joshua’s prophecy videos, purportedly demonstrating his foreknowledge of events in the news, have created headlines of their own. In 2012, he

prophesied that an African head of state would die within 60 days. In a later video, he appeared to name a specific date. When the Malawian president, Bingu wa Mutharika, died of a cardiac arrest on this day, he was succeeded by Joyce Banda, a devotee of TB Joshua who'd visited his church several times. In the press, there was speculation as to whether Joshua's prediction was down to divine anointing or more mundane explanations.

The personal qualities that enabled Joshua's rise to global fame might not be obvious to the casual observer. He had an infectious smile, a warm and open demeanour, but his preaching was simplistic, repetitive, bordering on crude. It lacked the slick fluency of fellow Nigerian pastors such as Matthew Ashimolowo or Paul Adefarasin. Perhaps its simplicity was part of its power. Joshua rarely attempted personal anecdote or biblical interpretation. He traded in aphorisms, the kind of memorisable nuggets of inspiration that could provide equal comfort to lorry drivers and international businessmen.

But Joshua had not simply hit on a formula with broad appeal. He meant different things to different people. It's not hard to understand his appeal among the locals of Ikotun-Egbe, whose families his ministry nourished in the most literal way. It's a little harder to account for his hold over my old church friends, who'd swapped lives of privilege in the leafy suburbs of Winchester for the privations of disciple life.

When my old church, Immanuel, first made contact with TB Joshua in the late 90s, it was a time of frustrated hope. Immanuel had begun in the early 80s as a house church, meeting in people's living rooms. It was a local offshoot of Southampton Community church, which came out of a 70s movement so radically anti-denominationalist that it evaded being precisely named. "Evangelical" worked as a broad umbrella term. Sociologists called us "restorationist", related to a North American theological movement known as the New Apostolic Reformation. But in Immanuel, I'd never heard either of these labels.

We believed in the truth of the Bible, and the continuation of the spiritual gifts granted to the early Christians, such as tongues, healing and prophecy. We rejected dry liturgy and inherited tradition, and looked to the New Testament for a model of the church. Many believed that a return to the

authentic church outlined in the gospels would lead to its worldwide restoration, which in turn would pave the way for Christ's second coming.

To grow up in Immanuel was to absorb a radiant sense of anticipation, of being on the cusp of something unprecedented and barely imaginable. By the mid-90s, this anticipation had clarified into a specific prophecy. "Today, respected prophets and church leaders at home and abroad are confidently predicting that the Lord will surely give us the land in revival," wrote our pastor in the summer 1996 issue of the church magazine. Revival did not just denote a boom in Christianity. Some people spoke of the Holy Spirit hitting Winchester like a tidal wave. Shoppers in the city centre would collapse in the street, suddenly overwhelmed with God's power. The church would be inundated with people desperate to give their lives to Christ. There would be miracles, healings, countless people saved.

The prophecies felt plausible. Our church was expanding. Having moved from living rooms to rented halls, we'd recently got a long-term lease on a large Georgian building, formerly a concert hall, in the centre of Winchester. Around the world, we saw places in which the first stirrings of revival seemed to be happening. We read *The God Chasers*, by the US evangelist Tommy Tenney, whose title captured the restless, febrile spirit of the era. Our condition of material abundance kept us apathetic and lukewarm, he wrote. If we could shake ourselves out of the complacency of the times, we would surely see Him move. Church members travelled to places in which God was apparently doing something, in the hope that they might bring back the anointing with them. They went to Toronto, Buenos Aires, and finally, Joshua's church in Lagos, where the signs and wonders of the Book of Acts were said to be a daily reality.

Years passed, and the people in the supermarkets and betting shops of Winchester remained vertical and unrepentant. A divide emerged between the God chasers and the revival sceptics, whose low expectations were, in the minds of the God chasers, one of the reasons why revival hadn't happened yet.

To some in the church, TB Joshua seemed the epitome of a religious conman. To others, he was a bracingly radical presence, and his ministry the very opposite of comfortable Christianity. Members of Dan Winfield's

family set up an organisation offering trips to Scoan from the UK. “Why do I need to go to Nigeria to see what God is doing, when it should be happening here?” asked one of the FAQs on their website. The answer: “The different environment helps expose the depth of disappointment, cynicism and unbelief we live under in the west. It allows the Holy Spirit to renew our minds.”

Our pastor was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2001. He went to Scoan, where he was proclaimed healed by Joshua. He stopped taking medication as an act of faith. Around this time, another member of the church was diagnosed with cancer. After Joshua declared her healed, she cancelled her scheduled surgery. I was not around much during the period of desperate prayer and silent division that preceded their deaths. I was at university, getting occasional news from my parents, who were as horrified as I was by the rejection of medicine that accompanied these claims of healing.

I could understand, even in my disillusion, the appeal of this teaching. The prospect of our beloved pastor’s death was made more unbearable by the promise of revival we’d been hanging on to for years. What if his illness was not just cruel randomness, but demonic attack, intent on thwarting God’s plan for us? Not a tragedy, but a triumph deferred?

Joshua’s healing ministry, and others like it, had a get-out clause. If someone got better, it was thanks to the anointing of the Man of God. If they didn’t, it was because they – or those around them – lacked sufficient faith. There is no surer recipe for private misery than a belief in divine healing that can be prevented, even undone, by your own momentary doubts. After our pastor died, Immanuel’s decline accelerated. It limped on for a few years, losing members steadily, before finally disbanding.

TB Joshua found his vocation as prophet in a time of crisis in Nigeria. After the high oil prices of the early 70s prompted a decade of state spending and dramatic growth, their subsequent fall left Nigeria on the edge of an economic precipice. By 1986, the military regime was forced by the International Monetary Fund to accept a structural adjustment plan to facilitate the repayment of debts. The currency was radically devalued. Many state services collapsed. Much of Nigeria’s emergent middle class was

plunged into poverty. There was a wave of violent crime: kidnappings, car-jackings, home invasions. It was in this context that a boom in Nigerian Pentecostalism began.

Some scholars argue that this rise in Pentecostal Christianity amounted to a kind of neo-imperialism. At a time when western financial institutions were imposing brutal austerity measures, western preachers came to Nigeria spreading a prosperity gospel that taught people they could pray their way out of poverty, and that the struggle that mattered was in the spiritual realm, not the political. Other scholars, such as the Nigerian theologian Ogbu Kalu, have paid more attention to the ways in which Nigerians have taken this form of doing church and made it serve their own needs. There are surely more benevolent examples of Nigerian Pentecostalism than TB Joshua, but he does nothing if not exemplify this creativity.

Nigerians often lament the ways in which their country's abundance of natural resources has failed to translate into lasting prosperity: how they export raw materials such as petroleum and palm oil, only to buy them back from abroad in expensive refined form. Joshua's trickster genius lay in the way he took the raw materials of western Christianity and transformed them into something to sell back to the west.



Mourners queue to pay their last respects to TB Joshua in Lagos, Nigeria, in July. Photograph: Akintunde Akinleye/EPA

After leaving Scoan, Dan Winfield sent a cache of Joshua's supposedly sacred words to a friend, who put them through an academic plagiarism detector. As a young disciple, Dan had spent long hours transcribing and memorising these words, convinced that their uncanny, fragmented eloquence was proof that Joshua was channelling something beyond himself. This much was true. The plagiarism detection programme found that at least 19% of the text was plagiarised, largely from US evangelists such as Billy Joe Daugherty and Don De Welt – the kind of writers whose pamphlets flooded the Christian bookstands of Lagos in Joshua's early years as a prophet.

Some of his influences were more overt. On the walls of the Synagogue Church, there were framed pictures of famous, predominantly American evangelists: a group dubbed God's Generals by the US writer Roberts Liardon in his book of the same name. Disciples told me that Joshua often spoke of this book. The lives of these evangelists exemplified, at least in Liardon's telling, the man or woman of God as entrepreneur: driven, individualist and charismatic, contemptuous of the checks and balances of the law or denominational church. Several touched on a trope central to Joshua's own story: that of the unlettered Man of God. He was clearly literate enough to have gathered that his lack of formal education could be invoked to authenticate his prophetic gifts.

Far from refining western Pentecostalism, Joshua distressed it, like stonewashed denim, taking advantage of western Christians' yearning for supposed authenticity, and the blindspots of their exoticising gaze. In turn, the white faces and BBC voices of these disciples – always featured prominently on Emmanuel TV – gave his ministry extra prestige among his Lagos followers, and the attenders of his stadium tours across the global south.

For years, TB Joshua existed on the periphery of my awareness, one bizarre aspect of a religious upbringing I was glad to have left behind. Then, in 2010, he came sharply back into my life. I was forwarded an email that Dan

and Kate Winfield had written, explaining their reasons for leaving the church after so many years of devotion. Kate had confided in Dan that she'd been regularly sexually abused by Joshua over the course of several years. "It was like a veil was removed from my eyes," wrote Dan. Her disclosure made sudden sense of the depression that had afflicted her since they'd married in 2006. It also brought into clarity the authoritarian nature of Joshua's leadership that Dan had managed to justify to himself for years.

In the email, Dan and Kate went on to describe their experiences in astonishing detail. They spoke of sleep deprivation, public shaming and a community in which Joshua was considered infallible. They described witnessing Nigerian disciples being whipped and beaten by Joshua. They had been senior disciples, tasked with running a Scoan branch in London, now defunct. On leaving, they'd sent the email to a large number of friends, disciples and supporters. I couldn't fathom how the people who sent this email – clearly not lacking in intelligence or moral integrity – could have spent years in such a place.

At the time, Dan and Kate were not the only people to have left Scoan because of alleged sexual abuse by Joshua. Two other British female disciples had left with stories similar to Kate's. Bisola Johnson, who had been a senior Nigerian disciple, had made public allegations against Joshua, claiming she was one of numerous female disciples Joshua had abused. Her testimony had prompted Scoan to release a lengthy video called Beware of Blasphemers, which accused Bisola of being possessed by evil spirits, and having a "contemptible character".



A service at the Synagogue, Church of All Nations, with pastor TB Joshua and his associates. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Dan's exit from Scoan led me to reconnect with old church friends with whom I'd previously lost touch. We reminisced about Immanuel. We talked about Joshua, and shared our frustration about how difficult it was to find credible information about his church online. He was, according to the search results, either a great Man of God or the antichrist. The critical articles were as hyperbolic as the puff pieces.

We decided to start a blog called TB Joshua Watch. The first few posts gathered the better critical accounts of Scoan that were scattered around the internet. Some of my friends, who were still practising Christians, addressed the holes in Joshua's theology. We wrote posts debunking Joshua's prophecy videos, which were released after the events they claimed to predict.

The blog soon picked up momentum. We started receiving emails from people around the world keen to share their experiences as disciples. We got threatening emails from Joshua supporters, including one promising that "confession" videos would soon be released to discredit disciples who had written posts.

What was surprising was the number of emails we received that were addressed to TB Joshua himself. People must have come across our blog and concluded, without reading it, that we were an official Scoan site. The emails were mostly pleas for healing or prayer, and occasionally for money. Most were from sub-Saharan Africa: Nigeria, Ghana and Zimbabwe, among others. Some were sagas in miniature: tales of orphaned children, traitorous husbands, wayward brothers, dreams of studying electronic engineering thwarted by poverty. There were stories of indebtedness and precarity; postcards from a world with no safety net, in which professions and degrees failed to guarantee a basic level of survival. Some included attachments: CVs or scanned diplomas, photos of those asking for prayer.

“I have tried to save my family from this financial hardship by creating other sources of income but to no avail,” read one email. “I currently have another business (selling of houses and lands, sugar and oil). Man of God, please help me break through with this business successfully. My sisters and I rely on my meager salary which does not even last us the entire month. As a result, my mum supports us from her little daily sales.”

The average westerner went to Scoan seeking deliverance from the ennui of comfortable modernity. Others, inhabiting different modernities, looked to TB Joshua for a radical Christianity equal to the radical uncertainty of their lives. I was struck, reading these emails, by the bare fact of Joshua’s psychological power. How many human longings converged on him? He entered people’s dreams. He rallied them on. He illuminated hopes of a better future.

It seemed wrong to receive these heartfelt pleas and not reply. But as TB Joshua Watch, we could offer nothing but disappointment. In the end, we only sent one reply, to an Ethiopian man in the US who was asking for healing from HIV. We didn’t pretend to be Joshua, exactly, but left the email unsigned.

Dear G,

Thank you for your email. I will pray for you. I would urge you to follow medical advice and take medication if at all possible. Be careful of those

who tell you to abandon medical treatment. God does wonderful work through doctors. God bless and stay strong.

G's reply was short, and clearly unimpressed. "I AM TAKING A MEDICATION BUT I WANT TO COME SO THAT GOD MAY DO MIRACLE THRO YOU CAN I KNOW HOW?"

What G didn't realise – and who were we to explain? – was that any power Joshua possessed had an inverse relationship to his proximity. That he worked best, if at all, as a distant beacon of hope. That he did the least harm to the ones who couldn't afford to come to Lagos for healing.

On Friday 12 September 2014, at around midday, a six-storey Scoan guesthouse collapsed. About 300 visitors were staying in the building at the time. Many were having dinner in the ground-floor canteen. TV footage showed the aftermath: a dense tangle of twisted metal, ripped mattresses and bedsheets, layers of collapsed concrete floors. Weeks later, a final death toll would be confirmed: [116 people were killed](#), 85 of whom were visitors from South Africa.

Two days after the collapse, the Sunday service went ahead as usual. Joshua explained to the assembled crowd that Scoan had been attacked. He showed a video that attributed the collapse to a plane flying low over the guesthouse. Later, the church would make the claim more specific: a mysterious plane fired an infrasonic weapon at the building, which caused it to collapse. The video showed CCTV footage of the guesthouse, pausing to highlight the silhouette of a plane flying overhead, then unpausing. Seconds later, the building fell. Joshua claimed that this was a failed assassination attempt. "Don't be scared," he said to the congregation. "You are not the target. I am the target. I know my hour has not yet come. Anything close to Jesus receives attack."

If Joshua was distraught about the loss of life, he did not show it. He gave one concession to the gravity of the occasion. He proposed a minute's silence in memory of the victims, whom he referred to as "Martyrs of Faith". The dead, lying under rubble just a few metres from the auditorium, had not yet been counted. Some of them, in all likelihood, were not even dead yet.

But they had already been co-opted into a minor supporting role in Joshua's personal mythology. The minute's silence lasted just under 20 seconds, and TB Joshua moved on.



TB Joshua with then president of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan after the collapse of the Scoan guesthouse in 2014. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Over the coming months, the church's PR machine pushed Joshua's explanation for the collapse. Newspapers printed unquestioning stories about infrasonic weapons. (One brave journalist, Nicholas Ibekwe, released audio that [captured](#) Joshua offering cash for friendly stories.) Some reports drew on the judgments of supposed engineers, whose papers had hastily appeared in obscure pay-to-publish journals (one such paper contained 170 references, the vast majority of which were links to Emmanuel TV clips on YouTube with titles like Face to Face with Lucifer! and Human Possessed by Lizard Demon!).

In 2015, a coroner's inquest concluded that Scoan was guilty of causing death through criminal negligence. They found that the guesthouse was constructed poorly, using substandard building materials, without planning permission or input from a structural engineer. Builders had recently added two extra floors to the guesthouse, without making changes to the foundations. Joshua was summoned to give evidence at the inquest several

times but failed to appear. He kept his head down for a few months, letting disciples take services. Then he returned. A criminal case was brought against Scoan by the Lagos state government, but the case got nowhere, mired in endless adjournments and delays. Scoan resumed its status as the No 1 tourist destination in Nigeria, even while rubble from the guesthouse still lay in the Scoan complex.

When I first heard Joshua's response to the collapse of the guesthouse, it seemed like the height of hubris and callousness. But it also made a kind of sense. One side-effect of his claim of divine anointing was that it forced him to constantly outrun the facts of his ordinary humanity. To have even acknowledged the collapse as a tragedy would have risked a greater collapse in his reputation as Man of God. He could only up the ante, whatever the cost to truth or dignity. The collapse could either be proof of his human fallibility, or a satanic attack that proved his anointing.

TB Joshua did not merely make a fortune from the story of prophethood he told. He built a vast and teetering human edifice around it, one that defied gravity for decades, held up by money and silence, and one that now faces a crisis in the wake of his death. He rose far above the poverty of his upbringing, but never left the precarity behind.

On the fourth day of the funeral, Joshua's body was brought from Prayer Mountain to the Synagogue for the lying in state. A motorcade of police vehicles and SUVs made its way through the dense crowd gathered outside the church, followed by a military marching band on the back of a lorry, then a hearse displaying Joshua's body.

At the time of the funeral, the question of succession remained unclear. Joshua's wife, Evelyn, was named the head of the church immediately after his death. A few weeks later, the official Scoan Facebook page released an interview with Joshua, purportedly conducted in the final weeks of his life. He stopped short of definitive statements, but appeared to suggest that Evelyn did not have his blessing as successor. "The issue of family should not come into the issue of the church," he said. Scoan was an apostolic ministry, he added, not a business to be handed down. When asked what

he'd done to prepare for succession, he pointed to the five senior disciples to whom he'd recently given the titles of prophet and prophetess.

Other large Nigerian ministries, such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, have navigated succession struggles and gone on to thrive. But Scoan has always been a one-man show. The disciple community lacked any stable hierarchy, relying on a provisional pecking order, subject to Joshua's mercurial moods. Joshua rarely delegated, instead fostering a relationship with every individual disciple.

For disciples, to serve TB Joshua was to be one step away from the unfettered power of the Holy Spirit. It also meant living under relentless pressure, always chasing the prophet's favour, always frantic to avoid missteps, always worried about sleeping later than him, who insisted on being greeted by disciples no matter what time he woke.

Watching the disciples pay their last respects, it struck me how even for the most devoted and grief-stricken, Joshua's death might be experienced, in part, as a liberation. While holding up the promise of anointing, he also kept a check on ambitions, fiercely protective of his own authority. But the atmosphere of conflict and mutual suspicion that he encouraged will undoubtedly shape whatever comes next.

On the fifth day of the funeral, Joshua's mausoleum was revealed: a hangar-sized hall within the Scoan complex, constructed with impressive speed. A pathway of illuminated posts marked the route that future visitors would tread, past a large circular fountain, its water lit up neon blue, towards the marble grave, housed within a white colonnade that held up a triangular roof, like a Greek temple in miniature.

Scoan did everything possible to emphasise how his passing was neither untimely nor unforeseen. He was called home – and if he did not physically ascend to heaven, his death could at least remain perfectly vague, unblemished by details of bodily failure. Now the inconvenient fact of the mortal man was gone, TB Joshua had become pure mythology. All-too-fallible flesh had become word.

** These names have been changed*

Matthew McNaught's book, Immanuel, will be published in June 2022

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Interview

Altheia Jones-Lecointe: the Black Panther who became a Mangrove Nine hero

[Bryan Knight](#)



Altheia Jones-Lecointe in the early 70s ... the special branch described her as ‘academically brilliant’ and ‘very militant’. Photograph: Neil Kenlock

Thu 9 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Dr Altheia Jones-Lecointe describes her arrival in the UK as more than just a complete shock. The woman who would be labelled by Special Branch as “the brains behind the Black Panther Movement”, and go on to win a groundbreaking legal case against the government, says her move to Britain at the age of 20 was “mind-shattering”.

Swapping Trinidad for 1960s Britain was, she recounts, being transplanted from a “safe, warm place [where] your presence is normal” to a country where racism was so widespread she felt her very humanity was consistently under scrutiny. It was, she remembers, “a mind-boggling experience to recognise that you [aren’t] the person that you thought you were”.

Which is perhaps why, between 1965 and 1973, Jones-Lecointe was at the forefront of Black radical politics in Britain, using this short time to make some seismic changes to the country. This intensely private woman is remembered as the leader of the British Black Panther Movement (BPM), although her commitment to collective politics means she denies there was any such post. But what is certainly true is that, when Jones-Lecointe – now a retired senior lecturer at the University of the West Indies – won a groundbreaking victory as one of the Mangrove Nine (recently [dramatised by Steve McQueen in Mangrove](#)), she became one of Britain’s most remarkable political activists.

Jones-Lecointe was born in 1945 in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Her mother, Viola, was a dressmaker and owner of the Little Marvel Dress Shop; her father, Dunstan, was a school principal. Both held key roles in the People’s National Movement, founded in 1955 by the man who was to become the first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Eric Williams.



Letitia Wright as Altheia Jones-Lecointe in Steve McQueen's film *Mangrove*. Photograph: Des Willie/AP

"My father was the chairman of the local party group and my mother was the secretary," says Jones-Lecointe. "So, there was a political party group in our house." As children, Jones-Lecointe and her younger sisters, Jennifer and Beverly, accompanied their parents as they campaigned and marched, listening to conversations about independence and how a post-colonial society should be organised.

In 1965, when she was 20, Jones-Lecointe left Trinidad to study chemistry at University College London. She was not particularly keen to come to Britain, she clarifies, but "the UK was the head of the house as far as our colonial history was concerned. So everybody who wanted to have a good-quality higher education would value coming to the UK because [it] was the mother country."

In the first week of her course, she arrived at an introductory meeting with lecturers and her fellow students. "When I went in, the discussion that was going on just as I entered fell into a hush," she remembers. Finally, "one brave soul ventured to speak: 'Are you sure you're in the right place?' So, I said: 'Well, yes, I came to read special chemistry.'" For Jones-Lecointe, it

was telling. “It’s a question that continues to haunt black people in England: ‘Are you sure you’re in the right place?’”

While racism is often discussed as if it is just about racial slurs – which she certainly faced – Jones-Lecointe says this is just the tip of the iceberg. It “runs far deeper than discussing racism at the level of people calling you a ‘nig nog’ and [making] jokes. The whole thing is a physical, psychological and emotional revolution that the human person has to make.”

Her arrival coincided with rising discrimination towards Black and south Asian communities. In Notting Hill, west London, there were violent attacks by fascist groups such as the League of Empire Loyalists, White Defence League and the Union Movement, led by Oswald Mosley. The community was still reeling from the 1958 race riots and [the unsolved, racist murder of the Antiguan carpenter Kelso Cochrane](#). Harassment by white residents and the police was commonplace.

Unsurprisingly, a horrified Jones-Lecointe felt she needed to “find a space with other people – to figure out what the hell this whole thing is all about”. She began joining the political activities at the West Indian students’ centre, and during her PhD, the university’s socialist society and students’ union.

One campaign took on the university’s racist housing practices, which it refused to change. Jones-Lecointe [told an oral history project that the university](#) “had two lists: one for landladies who would take black students and one for [those] who wouldn’t take black students”. The students demonstrated and the BPM came along to support them. This is, said Jones-Lecointe, “how I got involved and became aware that one had to do more work in the Black community than in the general socialist movement”.

The BPM had been formed in April 1968, by the Nigerian playwright Obi Egbuna, and its origins lay at [Speaker’s Corner in Hyde Park](#), London, where Black radicals would regularly meet to discuss politics. At this point the BPM was a small group of men, including Jones-Lecointe’s eventual husband, Eddie Lecointe, Sam Sagay and Peter Martin, who organised demonstrations and produced a newsletter, Black Power Speaks.



Jones-Lecointe, c1970. Photograph: Neil Kenlock

But in July 1968, Egbuna was [arrested after publishing a pamphlet](#) titled What to Do If Cops Lay Their Hands on a Black Man at the Speaker's Corner. The pamphlet merely advocated for collective self-defence in response to police harassment, but he was charged with inciting violence against police officers.

After his arrest, former members say Jones-Lecointe had the reins. She, however, sees it differently, pointing out the BPM was a collective. Speaking to a Global Woman's Strike panel in 2012, she said: "I don't know how suddenly I've become a 'leader', we didn't recognise those categories."

Nor were the BPM a political party, she says. "We called ourselves a 'movement' consciously because you didn't have to be a member to be an activist, to take responsibility for what was happening to you. A movement is a conscious decision, to organise, to deal with the issues that face you."

Former Panthers talk about a "central core" of members, including Jones-Lecointe, her husband, Eddie, Keith Spencer, Ira O'Flaherty and the writers Farrukh Dhondy and Mala Sen who organised activities that included setting up Saturday schools to teach Black history, creating a youth league of the

BPM, publishing their newsletter, Freedom News, canvassing door-to-door – and most importantly having a rigorous reading programme.

All Panthers were expected to study key texts – most importantly The Black Jacobins by CLR James. “The Black Jacobins stands as the Bible for inspiring us,” she says. “Anybody who is interested in how one changes a desperate situation, total defeat, total subjugation, [needs] to read the Black Jacobins and see what the people of Haiti did, and why today they continue to pay the price for their determination and their success against all the major European powers at the time.”

By 1970, the Panthers were mainly based in Finsbury Park, north London, and in Shakespeare Road in Brixton, south London. But there were also links with Black and Asian organisations across the country, and Panther movements around the world. At their height, they numbered about 300 people but, as former Panther and dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson has said: “Our presence was greater than our membership.”

Racist attacks from the far right and the police were one of the challenges they faced. Jones-Lecointe remembers one incident, which changed the life of a 17-year-old called Olive Morris. The BPM were selling their newsletter in Brixton. “One Saturday we were in the market and a tall Nigerian man was standing by his car being confronted by the police.” The police accused the man of stealing the car. “A big kerfuffle started up because we were around there selling our paper, and two young people from the Black Panther Movement, Olive and somebody else, Joelle, were arrested.”



Eddie Lecointe in the mid 70s. Photograph: Neil Kenlock

Morris, who had rushed to the defence of the man, was brutally beaten by police. The man, it soon became clear, was not a car thief but a diplomat from the Nigerian embassy. Yet Jones-Lecointe remembers the home secretary, James Callaghan, saying on television that “the police were right [and just] doing their job”. This episode, Jones-Lecointe says, was just one example of the harassment they faced on a daily basis.

Classified documents discovered in 2010, by the historians Robin Bunce and Paul Field, show that Jones-Lecointe and the Black Power Movement were subject to a vast surveillance operation in the 1970s. Written by a special branch taskforce, the documents describe Jones-Lecointe as “academically brilliant” and “very militant”.

In 1970, Jones-Lecointe put these attributes to good use when she found herself fighting the police in a different form – through the courts in one the most significant legal cases in British history: the Mangrove Nine trial.

The Mangrove restaurant opened on All Saints Road, west London, in 1968, offering not just West Indian food, but a meeting place. In their biography of the broadcaster and activist Darcus Howe, Bunce and Field describe the restaurant as “decorated with traditional African art as well as with pictures

of hip musicians". It quickly began attracting famous diners – from Nina Simone and Bob Marley to Diana Ross and Marvin Gaye. White liberals and counterculture individuals such as Vanessa Redgrave and Colin MacInnes followed. "Everybody used to go there," Jones-Lecointe says. "The lame, the halt and the blind could be found at the Mangrove."



The Mangrove restaurant in August 1970. Photograph: Evening Standard/Getty Images

Yet the success of the restaurant and its owner, the Black entrepreneur Frank Critchlow, attracted police harassment. The police began to raid the restaurant frequently, citing unsubstantiated claims that there were drugs on the premises. Eventually the BPM and Howe, a soon-to-be member, decided to organise a demonstration in the restaurant's defence.

On 9 August 1970, about 150 people took to the streets, listened to speeches by Howe and Jones-Lecointe, and marched towards the local police station. A staggering 700 police officers were sent out to meet them. As Jones-Lecointe recounts: "At a certain stage [the police] decided they were going to break up the demonstration and they had certain people who they targeted for arrest." There was a violent confrontation on Portnall Road.

In court, Jones-Lecointe's cross examination detailed the abuse she faced. She explained how she went to help a young black woman who "had blood on the left side of her face [and] was bawling and crying". A policeman shouted at her, asking: "What do you want?" and warning: "If you don't go, we'll have you." When Jones-Lecointe continued to help the distressed woman, five police grabbed the pair and started dragging them away, elbowing Jones-Lecointe in the process. "They were showing off and I got the worst of it," she said.

The nine individuals arrested and charged with inciting a riot and affray were Jones-Lecointe, Howe, Critchlow, Godfrey Millett, Rupert Boyce, Rhodan Gordon, Anthony Innis, Rothwell Kentish and Barbara Beese. But what they did during their 55-day trial at the Old Bailey changed everything, as they adopted a radical strategy that put into practice their Black Power ideologies.

Some self-representation was deemed crucial as it encouraged community self-reliance and helped circumvent the obstructions of the criminal justice system. It was decided that Jones-Lecointe and Howe would represent themselves, so they could talk freely about their experiences of police racism. Meanwhile, Howe and Ian Macdonald QC, the barrister for Beese, invoked rights enshrined in Magna Carta to demand an all-Black jury.



Photograph used in evidence at the Mangrove Nine trial. Photograph: FLHC Maps 15/Alamy

Jones-Lecointe and Howe were talented orators, and succeeded in exposing police lies during the cross examinations – humiliating the prosecution and causing roars of laughter from the gallery. Macdonald later said of Jones-Lecointe: “She’s the kind of person who could read out the alphabet and you’d be transfixed.”

In a 1973 documentary, Jones-Lecointe described how the prosecution mischaracterised the Mangrove restaurant, using racially charged terminology. The police officer Frank Pulley, the instigator of the raids, described the Mangrove as a “den of iniquity” and said it was full of “local criminals, pences and prostitutes”. When these comments were relayed to the local Labour MP, Bruce Douglas-Mann, a character witness for the nine and a frequent diner at the restaurant, he strongly rejected Pulley’s statements.

The nine were found not guilty of inciting a riot – a monumental victory for the Black community in Britain and a great embarrassment for the Metropolitan police and British state. The activist Selma James, who was a defence witness, [pointed out on a Radio 4 documentary](#) that: “If the Panthers had lost, the police would have felt empowered in what they were doing and therefore this case was a test case for all of us.”

Jones-Lecointe remembers Critchlow’s barrister, David Croft, trying to divide him from the other defendants, and a Trinidadian embassy representative attempting to do the same to her. In the end she became so incensed that, [according to MacDonald](#), she ended up “bashing [Critchlow’s barrister] over the head” with her shoe. Jones-Lecointe has said she doesn’t remember that episode.

The trial marked the pinnacle of the Black Power Movement. Afterwards there were debates on whether to focus on gender, class or solely race. Some BPM members, such as Morris, left to form Black women’s groups, and others, such as Howe, went on to edit the journal [Race](#) Today. Jones-Lecointe continued campaigning with the BPM, which was renamed the Black Workers’ Movement, until 1974.

In Steve McQueen's critically acclaimed Small Axe series, Jones-Lecointe was played by Letitia Wright. But when I ask what she thought of the film and [the subsequent documentary, Black Power](#), by the director, she says she has not seen them. Since the BPM ended, Jones-Lecointe has divided her time between Trinidad and Britain as a physician, specialising in haematology, and a research scientist. Do her colleagues know of her activist achievements? "I doubt that," she smiles. During our conversation, when I list her achievements, she leans forward, looks me in the eye, and says simply: "It's not enough."

I ask what she thinks of the Black Lives Matter movement. "I can't talk for your generation," she says. But she leaves me with some parting advice: "It's your generation's choice," she says. "It's Black people's choice. If you want to be dead, play that. One day, we'll wake up and do what the living do – which is to live!"

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Fossil fuels

How much of the world's oil needs to stay in the ground?



Climate protesters from Extinction Rebellion in London last month.
Photograph: Martin Pope/Sopa/Rex/Shutterstock



Damian Carrington *Environment editor*

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Wed 8 Sep 2021 11.00 EDT

The vast majority of fossil fuel reserves owned today by countries and companies must remain in the ground if the climate crisis is to be ended, an analysis has found.

The research found 90% of coal and 60% of oil and gas reserves could not be extracted if there was to be even a 50% chance of keeping global heating below 1.5C, the temperature beyond which the worst climate impacts hit.

The scientific study is the first such assessment and lays bare the huge disconnect between the Paris agreement's climate goals and the expansion plans of the fossil fuel industry. The researchers described the situation as "absolutely desperate".

"The [analysis] implies that many operational and planned fossil fuel projects [are] unviable," the scientists said, meaning trillions of dollars of fossil fuel assets could become worthless. New fossil fuel projects made sense only if their backers did not believe the world would act to tackle the climate emergency, the researchers said.

The conclusions of the report are “bleak” for the fossil fuel industry, implying that oil, gas and coal production must have already peaked and will decline at 3% a year from now. States that are heavily reliant on fossil fuel revenue, such as Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, are at especially high risk. A minister from one [Opec state recently warned of “unrest and instability”](#) if their economies did not diversify in time.

[Most fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground for a chance of keeping global heating below 1.5C](#)

To keep below 1.5C, the analysis says:

- The US, Russia and the former Soviet states have half of global coal reserves but will need to keep 97% in the ground, while the figure for Australia is 95%. China and India have about a quarter of global coal reserves, and will need to keep 76% in the ground.
- Middle Eastern states have more than half the world oil reserves but will need to keep almost two-thirds in the ground, while 83% of Canada’s oil from tar sands must not be extracted.
- Virtually all unconventional oil or gas, such as from fracking, must remain in the ground and no fossil fuels at all can be extracted from the Arctic.

“It is absolutely desperate,” said Prof Paul Ekins of University College London, UK, and one of the research team. “We are nowhere near the Paris target in terms of the fossil fuels people are planning to produce.”

“Whenever wherever oil and gas is found, every government in the world, despite anything it may have said [about climate], tries to pump it out of the ground and into the atmosphere as quickly as possible. It will require private companies to write down their reserves but, for countries with nationalised oil companies, they just see a whole heap of their wealth evaporating.

“But the positive side is that we actually can do it. We know clean electricity technologies can be deployed at scale very quickly, when the policy mechanisms are put in place to do it.”

The researchers said ensuring a fair transition for the many workers in the fossil fuel industry was vital.

Christiana Figueres, the UN climate chief when the Paris climate deal was signed, said: “We must keep fossil fuels in the ground. A safe future has no space for any new fossil fuel extraction. The shift to clean energy must be accelerated in order to maintain human activity now and protect human wellbeing tomorrow.”

Christophe McGlade, a senior analyst at the International Energy Agency (IEA), said: “The research underlines how the rhetoric of tackling climate change has diverged from reality. None of the net zero pledges made to date by major oil and gas producing countries include explicit targets to curtail production.”

Mike Coffin, an analyst at the financial thinktank Carbon Tracker, said: “It is critical that investors in oil and gas companies are aware of the transition risks. There is a very real risk of assets becoming stranded.”

Its latest report finds companies risk wasting more than a trillion dollars on projects incompatible with a low-carbon world, with ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Chevron and Shell most exposed.

In May, an IEA report concluded that there could be no new oil, gas or coal development if the world was to reach net zero by 2050. A UN report in December found fossil fuel production must fall rapidly to keep under 1.5C and avoid “severe climate disruption” but that countries were planning increased outputs.

The new research, published in the journal Nature, used a complex model of global energy use that prioritised use of the fossil fuels that are cheapest to extract, such as Saudi oil, in using up the remaining carbon budget. Costly and highly polluting reserves, such as Canada’s tar sands and Venezuelan oil, are left in the ground in the model.

[Chart of countries' fossil fuel reserves](#)

The analysis took account of how rapidly fossil fuel use could feasibly be ramped down with, for example, coal use in India and China taking time to eliminate. It also considered the cost of renewable energy alternatives in each country. Reserves were defined as the coal, oil and gas that was economic to extract in 2018, before the coronavirus pandemic.

The proportions of unextractable reserves produced by the analysis are much higher than for a [related analysis in 2015](#). This reflects a reduction of the temperature target from 2C to 1.5C and the fast falling costs of renewables and electric vehicles, with the latter set to significantly cut oil demand.

“The bleak picture painted by our scenarios for the global fossil fuel industry is very likely an underestimate of what is required,” the researchers said. This is because the carbon budget used only gives a 50% chance of 1.5C and because the scientists assumed a significant level of CO2 removal from the atmosphere using technology that is yet to be proven at scale.

The researchers said there were some “promising signs”, with global coal production having peaked in 2013 and oil output now thought to be at or near peak demand, even by some industry commentators. They said action to cut production could include ending subsidies, taxes and even bans on new exploration. Denmark and Costa Rica recently founded an [alliance of countries setting an end date for fossil fuels](#).



A coal mine in Pennsylvania, US. Researchers said there were some ‘promising signs’ of global coal production having peaked in 2013. Photograph: Dane Rhys/Reuters

“The net zero test has to be if you want new [fossil fuel production], you must categorically show what is going to decline elsewhere so we can stay within the carbon budget,” Ekins said. “That, of course, is a test that neither the [planned new UK oilfields](#) nor the new [Cumbrian coalmine](#) meet.”

A spokesperson for the International Association of Oil & [Gas](#) Producers said: “Meeting global energy demand while achieving decarbonisation is a priority for industry and society. Achieving this without further investments in new oil and gas fields would require massive deployment of other energy sources and efficiencies, as well as huge investments in new technologies, all ramped up at a pace we haven’t seen yet.”

Energy ministers in fossil fuel-rich countries have recently rejected suggestions that exploration and production should decline. Australia’s [Keith Pitt said](#): “Reports of coal’s impending death are greatly exaggerated and its future is assured well beyond 2030.” In June, commenting on the IEA net zero report, Saudi Arabia’s [Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said](#): “I believe it is a sequel of [the] La La Land movie.”

The UK government, which is hosting the crucial Cop26 climate summit in Glasgow at the end of October, was contacted for comment.

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[Television](#)

Time Trumpet: the savage cult comedy that ‘predicted’ the future



A spoof of Dragon's Den on Time Trumpet. Photograph: BBC/Kieron McCarron

[*Daniel Dylan Wray*](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

“The airwaves were infected with them,” says [Armando Iannucci](#) of early 00s celebrity talking-head shows such as I Love the 80s. “Television was going through an identity crisis of looking back and eating itself and it was obsessed with celebrities. The history of the Nazi party would have to have someone from the equivalent of Love Island on it.”

The comedy writer’s response was to create, alongside co-writers Roger Drew and Will Smith, the 2006 series Time Trumpet, a retrospective documentary set in 2031 looking back on the first 30 years of the 21st century, with cultural commentators including Stewart Lee, Jo Enright, Adam Buxton and Richard Ayoade.

The fake television shows and events on which they were asked to reflect remain brilliantly ludicrous 15 years later: a CBBC show called Spicey Slicey, where youngsters went under the knife live on air; Charlotte Church vomiting herself inside out; Sebastian Coe murdering Justin Lee Collins after he revealed the London 2012 Olympics were a hoax; and “the most popular TV programme of all time”, Rape an Ape. Yet, despite the huge talents involved and its status as a unique and innovative programme, Time Trumpet is the definition of a cult show. It exists only on DVD and YouTube – the BBC doesn’t even have it on iPlayer.



Armando Iannucci. Photograph: BBC/Kieron McCarron/BBC

This is slightly incongruous, considering the future-facing themes of the series. The writing team met with scientists and experts to discuss what life might look like in 25 years, scouring ad agencies for talent (“Advertising is full of people who really want to go into comedy,” says Iannucci). This brought them to the future film director Ben Wheatley, as well as another rising star, Gareth Edwards. The latter – later the director of Rogue One: A Star Wars Story – created effects for scenes such as Tesco invading Denmark.

As for the script, it was a moveable feast. “I didn’t know any of the things I was going to be doing,” recalls Stewart Lee of making the series. “Armando would ask questions and we improvised around the answers.” Others had scripted parts, but capturing spontaneity was key. “Sometimes I dropped people in it,” says Iannucci. “But I tried not to think too hard, because I wanted to be genuinely surprised by what they might come up with, like Adam Buxton doing a travelogue on the best places in the world to have a wank. Now, that’s not something I ever woke up and thought about, but if he wanted to bring it to the table then he was more than welcome.”

Actors were also drafted in to play celebrities in 2031, reflecting on their own lives, be it Tom Cruise proclaiming he is “pound for pound the strongest man on this planet” or Ant and Dec being put in charge of an inquiry into Britain’s binge-drinking epidemic. “It made us laugh, the idea of David Beckham channel surfing and coming across Time Trumpet,” reflects Will Smith. “And then being like: ‘Oh, there’s a man pretending to be me as a centaur with a vagina stitched into his arm.’ And just how baffled he’d be as to why this was happening.”

Charlotte Church didn’t see Time Trumpet at broadcast. “I would have been totally bemused and maybe found it a bit offensive,” she says. “But now I don’t find it offensive in the slightest. I think it’s comedy genius. Sure, it was based on a twisted tabloid press stereotype of my character, but it’s odd, extreme and hilarious.”



An actor playing Tony Blair in Iraq on Time Trumpet. Photograph: BBC/Kieron McCarron/BBC

The show also married extreme daftness with political bite. Tony Blair, in particular, is a constant target. “The war on terror is very much a subtext,” says Roger Drew. Smith adds: “The appalling mistake of Iraq was definitely in the air, so we had Blair wandering around Baghdad in a stupor of guilt.” A scene in which Blair is assassinated was cut from the DVD home release.

The format allowed them to go to extremes that a show more rooted in reality couldn’t. “You can say terrible things, but nobody can sue you, because it’s all in the future,” laughs Iannucci. “Because we’re operating in the abstract and saying: ‘We’re making this up, this is clearly spurious,’ it allows you the freedom to approach subjects that are a bit more sensitive. It allows you to go further and slip in more impactful stuff if what’s around it is a bit more playful and speculative.”

Fifteen years on, what did *Time Trumpet* get right? Well, Jamie Oliver didn’t clone himself to sell his own brand of meat. Nor did Vernon Kay continue to grow in height until he had to be “destroyed”, but some events aligned. “One thing *Time Trumpet* definitely got right is predicting David Cameron was going to do something catastrophically terrible with consequences that

would echo for years,” says Smith. “Which does tally quite neatly with his legacy.”

As for the legacy of Time Trumpet, Drew describes it as “the one that got away”. Lee hasn’t seen it since it aired. “I’ve got a DVD somewhere,” he says. “I’m waiting for them to all come down to 50p on Amazon and then I can sell them on tour for £5.99. But the problem with you writing this is that now they’ll go up in value.”

Even so, might there be potential for a future return? “Maybe as a one-off special,” says Iannucci. “I’m always interested in playing with what we perceive to be real and what isn’t. The problem now is fakery has become more sinister. If anything, we’re fighting hard to identify what’s real. I’d hate to conclude that Time Trumpet is a toolkit for rightwing organisations – that’s not what I went into comedy for.”

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Coronavirus

Unvaccinated health and care workers in England could be redeployed



A Covid-19 vaccinator prepares Moderna doses. The government previously said all staff in registered care homes in England must be vaccinated against Covid from 11 November, unless medically exempt.

Photograph: SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 04.03 EDT

Health and care sector workers in [England](#) who decline to be fully vaccinated could be moved to back-office roles, a UK government minister has suggested, as a consultation on plans to mandate Covid-19 and flu vaccinations was launched.

The six-week consultation process will take views on whether vaccine requirements should apply for health and wider social care workers – those in contact with patients and people receiving care.

It would mean only those who are fully vaccinated, unless medically exempt, could be deployed to deliver health and care services.

The government previously said all staff in registered care homes in England must be vaccinated against Covid-19 from 11 November, unless medically exempt.

Speaking on Times Radio, Helen Whately, the minister for care, said the government was working with care homes and other settings to see if workers who refused the vaccine could be redeployed.

She said: “You can look at whether there are alternative ways somebody could be deployed, for instance, in a role that doesn’t involve frontline work, or doesn’t involve being physically in the same setting as the patient – whether it’s, for instance, working on 111, something like that.

“So we could look at alternative roles for individuals, these are exactly the sorts of things that we can investigate.”

But she suggested that people who refused to get vaccinated against coronavirus should not work in social care.

Speaking on Sky News, Whately said care homes had been hit particularly hard by Covid, and added: “The reality is that one of the best ways we can protect people living in care homes is through making sure that staff are vaccinated.”

Asked whether she was concerned that the vacancies in social care would increase by mandating that workers must be jabbed, she said: “The big question has to be ... if you don’t want to get vaccinated, how can you continue, how can it be right to continue, to look after people who are really vulnerable from Covid?”

Her remarks came as healthcare staff, patients and their families were being encouraged to take part in a consultation launched on Thursday.

The process will also seek views on whether flu vaccines should be a requirement for health and care workers.

Critics of compulsory vaccinations for care workers have claimed the policy would lead to many leaving their jobs at a time when vacancies are at a staggering 120,000.

According to the DHSC, about 92% of NHS trust staff have received one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine and 88% of staff have received both doses.

However, the DHSC says new data shows uptake rates between NHS trusts can vary from about 78% to 94% for both doses.

National flu vaccination rates in the health service have increased from 14% in 2002 to 76% last year. But in some settings, rates are as low as 53%.

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Scotland to require vaccine passports from 1 October – as it happened

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Communities

‘I found myself’: how the pandemic brought out the best in people



‘I found myself’: how the pandemic brought out the best in people
Composite: Guardian/REX/Shutterstock/CAPTURE THE LIGHT/AFP via Getty Images

[Kevin Rawlinson](#) and [Tobi Thomas](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

‘I miss them. I miss my patients’

“When there’s an absolute catastrophe, you really find yourself. And I think I love being a GP.”

It is perhaps not surprising that Dr Farzana Hussain loves her work, given that the east London GP has become known as the physician who made it her mission to try to call every one of her patients who had not yet been

vaccinated. Added to that is her incessant work on combatting misinformation and conspiracy theories online.

What might be surprising is how she found the energy. Like all frontline staff, Hussain was already working at an alarming rate trying to deal with the fallout from the pandemic during the second wave. “It sounds like a cliche, but I think I really found myself professionally and that gave me more energy to do it,” she said.

Hussain estimates that she and her colleagues working in the Newham area personally called about 500 people – focusing on the most vulnerable – to convince them to come and get vaccinated.

All of this while dealing with what she calls the “worst time ever” for healthcare workers – late 2020 and early 2021 – when she said they were surrounded by distressing rates of sickness and death.

The area, she explained, has been one of the worst hit by the pandemic in the whole of England and has had some of the lowest rates of vaccinations. Yet her practice, the Project Surgery, has had success – so much so she was chosen to help front an official campaign pushing for greater vaccine uptake, with the government praising the “tireless efforts” of the “hero GP”.

Part of this, she said, was because Newham’s demographics, with its large communities from several minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as white people from relatively deprived backgrounds, meant they were targeting their help on many of the groups who needed it most.

On a personal note, however, she said her work during the pandemic – and the rise to prominence it prompted – has been less fulfilling.

“I’m a real people person,” she said, explaining that her numbers of in-person consultations have fallen dramatically as most became remote to protect people from transmission. “On a personal level, I miss them. I miss my patients, so it’s not as satisfying for me.”

‘I can’t contemplate walking away from people in need’

For Matt Fowler, the co-founder of the [Covid Bereaved Families for Justice Group](#), public speaking and campaigning is an awkward experience. “I’m not an especially sociable person. And it has definitely taken me out of my comfort zone a bit to do the things that we’ve done.”

But, he said, they needed to be done. “I can’t get away from the fact that it’s something that is necessary. And it shouldn’t be necessary. As far as I’m concerned, the campaign should never have existed.”

Fowler started the campaign with Jo Goodman after his 56-year-old father, Ian, a retired design engineer for Jaguar Land Rover, died on 13 April 2020. Despite being out of his comfort zone, he and his colleagues have kept up the pressure for an immediate public inquiry so that lessons can be learned, he said, before more people die.

And they have provided one of the most striking images of the UK’s response to the tragedies of Covid-19: the memorial wall opposite the Houses of Parliament, where volunteers have painted more than 150,000 hearts – one for each of those who have died.



Pedestrians walk past the national Covid memorial wall in central London.
Photograph: Akira Suemori/Rex/Shutterstock

One of the things that angers him most is the fact his campaign has had to spend so much of its time fulfilling what he believes should be core functions of government during a national crisis.

“At the start of the campaign, we wanted to build a support network for people who were bereaved because they really did feel like they were on their own. The information available from the government was pretty sparse and a lot of the time people were coming to us because they didn’t know what they were supposed to be doing or how to deal with things.”

He described “bereavement support and counselling and financial support for funerals and things like that, because they had no idea about it. There just wasn’t that support network for those people.”

For someone so ill at ease in the spotlight, would he like to slip back into relative anonymity? “It’s an interesting question. I am very much out of my comfort zone and there is a big part of me that very much wishes for that sort of anonymity again.

“But another part of me is also thinking that what I’ve done has been the right thing to do. And I don’t think anybody should shy away from doing what’s right, no matter what it is and no matter how difficult and unnerving it can be.

“I very much feel like I’m so far out of my depth that I can’t even see the way back to shore. But it’s something I had to do. And if there is still that necessity for me to do something then I’ll have to carry on doing it because I can’t really contemplate walking away from people in need.”

‘We’re an ordinary family centred in something extraordinary’



Hannah Ingram-Moore and her family became a focus for attention after her father, Captain Sir Tom Moore, started raising money for the NHS by walking laps of his garden. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

“There was a moment as we hit £12m – in about the second week – that, for me personally, I realised things had changed in a way that I couldn’t change them back.”

Hannah Ingram-Moore is at the centre of a fundamental conflict. She does not believe the experience of becoming a focal point of so much attention after her father, Captain Sir Tom Moore, started raising money for the NHS by walking laps of his garden has changed her as a person. And yet it has changed her life and those of her relatives immeasurably.

“We had drones trying to take photos, we had long-range lenses over the hedges. There were helicopters overhead, there were satellite vans around every corner of the boundary of the house. And the world was calling my phone – it was heads of global organisations, countries, politicians, everyone that you can imagine,” she said.

The attention was placed on Ingram-Moore and her family as a result of her father’s fundraising. His laps of his garden and other activities run by the

family have collectively raised millions of pounds and made the second world war veteran a hero to many.



A portrait of Sir Tom Moore on the headstone of the family grave at Morton cemetery in Keighley, England. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty

Captain Tom died in February, aged 100. And as she travelled to Yorkshire to bury his ashes, Ingram-Moore described how she is now stopped in the street wherever she goes by people who want to talk about the charitable work she and her family have done.

And yet, she stressed, she would remain the sort of person who always agrees to stop and chat. "The conversation is about human connectivity; about the fact that people are fundamentally good and not bad.

"My father really believed that – he really believed that humanity is fundamentally good. And so we feel a responsibility to this incredible gift, a legacy that my father has left us."

She added: "If you ask me: have we changed? I think, honestly, no. But have we grown into our new roles? Yes, I think we have.

"And I try personally to respect my father's legacy every minute of every day. And every time that somebody talks to me, I know that what we

represent is an ordinary family. We are just like everybody else, just centred in this incredible, extraordinary legacy.”

‘Even though at times I’ve felt horrific, I wouldn’t change what I’ve been through’



Claire Hastie, the founder of the Long Covid Support, an online peer support and advocacy group with more than 40,000 members in 100 countries.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

When Claire Hastie first contracted coronavirus on 17 March 2020, a week before the first lockdown, it didn’t cross her mind that over a year later she would still not have recovered.

“Having coronavirus has been life changing,” she says. “I’ve had to use a wheelchair for over a year, I can’t walk 100 metres even. I’m hoping it’s temporary, but so far it’s been pretty life-changing not being able to walk or work. I haven’t had a symptom-free day.”

Hastie is one of the estimated 2 million people in the UK who has some variation of long-lasting symptoms from coronavirus, symptoms that can range from fatigue to loss of mobility. At the point when she’d been

bedridden for seven weeks, she set up a support group for people suffering with similar symptoms.

The group, [Long Covid](#) Support, now has more than 42,000 members from across 100 countries, and provides support and practical help for people experiencing long-Covid symptoms.

“I’m not very techie, I’d never set up a Facebook group before,” Hastie says. “But now we have a team of admins and moderators across different time zones. It’s grown into such a lovely community and is such a safe and supportive space.”

Despite the virus having affected many areas of her life, including her mobility and cognition, the work Hastie’s done on supporting those with long Covid and campaigning for more awareness of the condition has kept her going. Alongside founding the support group, Hastie also sits on the on the NHS England long-Covid taskforce committee and the long-Covid roundtable chaired by Lord Bethell.

“Running the group has kept me sane,” she says. “If I’d been lying in bed with no focus or purpose, it would have been a completely different experience.

“Even though at times I’ve felt horrific, I wouldn’t change what I’ve been through because of the learning and enrichment it has brought. In terms of the friendships formed, the people I get to interact with and the meetings I get invited to, I feel like it’s made a difference.

“The support group itself is a beautiful thing. It catches people when they fall. We have so many people commenting and saying that this group is the only thing that keeps me going through this.”

With the removal of almost all coronavirus restrictions being imminent, Hastie wants to make sure that people with long Covid aren’t forgotten. “When everything opens up, that’s when you feel like you’ve been left behind,” she says. “Everyone else would be resuming their normal lives but many people with long Covid won’t physically be able to do that.”

‘The thought of going into labour alone was frightening’



Holly Avis at home in Rushden, Northamptonshire. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

The moment Holly Avis became so infuriated at how pregnant women were being treated due to the pandemic was when the country began to open up after the first lockdown.

“Then it got to June [2020], and things like shops and gyms started to open up. Our local Primark in Rushden made the news due to how long the queue outside was,” she says. “At that point, I was like, hang on a minute? I’m allowed to go shopping with my friends but I’m not allowed to have my partner with me for the entirety of my labour?”

At that time, due to measures put in place amid the pandemic, restrictions were placed on the amount of time birthing partners were allowed to be present during their partner’s labour. The measures meant that in many hospitals, birthing partners were only allowed to be present once their pregnant partner was 4cm dilated.

Believing these restrictions to be a huge injustice, Avis, who was heavily pregnant with her third child at the time, set up a petition that called for a chosen birth partner to be allowed throughout the duration of the birth, as well as being able to attend any scans and appointments.

The popularity of the petition was something Avis didn't expect, amassing more than 200,000 signatures in a few days. After the launch of the petition, Abbi Leibert, a doula from the Birthbliss Academy, got in touch with Avis, and the petition became part of a wider campaign known as #ButNotMaternity. The campaign, made up by a collective of volunteers, seeks to ensure that maternity restrictions in the UK are proportionate to the risk of birth trauma as well as coronavirus. The campaign was instrumental in all NHS trusts allowing partners to attend scans and appointments since May.

Before coronavirus, Avis wasn't a campaigner, nor were birthing rights something she particularly thought about. "I didn't know too much about it before," she says. "I mean, I had two children previously but my knowledge of maternity and birthing rights was very limited. But now, the campaign has definitely put the seed into my head."

Avis is pleased with impact of the petition and the wider campaign has had. "I'm glad I listened to my own inner voice because it became the voice of so many people," she says. "The thought of going into labour alone was frightening enough, but through the campaign we've heard stories from people who had lost their baby, for instance, and how even more frightening that experience must have been."

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[New Zealand](#)

‘High-risk activity’: Ardern advises hospital visitors against sex with patients during Covid

00:34

NZ prime minister Jacinda Ardern struggles with tough question during Covid press conference – video

[Eva Corlett](#) in Wellington

Thu 9 Sep 2021 00.57 EDT

New Zealand’s prime minister Jacinda Ardern may have kept her cool through a global pandemic, but a question about a patient and a visitor having sex at an Auckland hospital had the typically unflappable leader struggling to contain her expressions.

Ardern and the director general of health Dr Ashley Bloomfield were giving their daily Covid-19 press conference, when a reporter asked them whether an allegation involving a patient and visitor who had “sexual relations” at Auckland hospital was considered a “high-risk activity, in the current climate”.

As the question was asked, Ardern’s face rapidly shifted through expressions, from disturbed, to exasperated, to bemused.

Dr Bloomfield responded to the question first with a smile: “I think it is a high-risk activity, potentially, however I don’t know any of the details about that interaction.”

Ardern followed up with: “I would say, generally, regardless of the Covid status, that kind of thing shouldn’t generally be part of visiting hours, I

would have thought.”

PM Jacinda Ardern says sexual relations, regardless of Covid status, shouldn’t “generally be part of [hospital] visiting hours.” Ashley Bloomfield: “It’s a high risk activity, potentially.”
pic.twitter.com/VeRVXg7QjU

— Aaron Dahmen (@dahmenaaron) [September 9, 2021](#)

The allegation comes as the [Auckland district health board faced criticism](#) for allowing hundreds of visitors to see patients a day, despite a strict city-wide lockdown in place to help stamp out an outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant.

presenting: our new kombucha girl <https://t.co/Q19pzbCH8V>
pic.twitter.com/zZkgHOkA14

— dejan (@heyDejan) [September 9, 2021](#)

The daily Covid-19 updates have provided New Zealand with news of case numbers, vaccines and more, but has also proved fertile ground for the occasional gaffe. The Covid-19 minister, [Chris Hipkins, made headlines last month](#), after he encouraged the public to socially distance when they “spread their legs”.

I believe Chris Hipkins only advocated the spreading of legs outside.
<https://t.co/OJkTwaVpYF>

— Gwynn Compton (@gwynncompton) [September 9, 2021](#)

2021.09.09 - Opinion

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Earth's tipping points could be closer than we think. Our current plans won't work

[George Monbiot](#)





A flash flood caused by Tropical Storm Henri in Helmetta, New Jersey, on 22 August 2021. ‘The extreme weather in 2021 – the heat domes, droughts, fires, floods and cyclones – is, frankly, terrifying.’ Photograph: Tom Brenner/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 9 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

If there’s one thing we know about climate breakdown, it’s that it will not be linear, smooth or gradual. Just as one continental plate might push beneath another in sudden fits and starts, causing periodic earthquakes and tsunamis, our atmospheric systems will absorb the stress for a while, then suddenly shift. Yet, everywhere, the programmes designed to avert it are linear, smooth and gradual.

Current plans to avoid catastrophe would work in a simple system like a washbasin, in which you can close the tap until the inflow is less than the outflow. But they are less likely to work in complex systems, such as the atmosphere, oceans and biosphere. Complex systems seek equilibrium. When they are pushed too far out of one equilibrium state, they can flip suddenly into another. A common property of complex systems is that it’s much easier to push them past a [tipping point](#) than to push them back. Once a transition has happened, it cannot realistically be reversed.

The old assumption that the Earth's tipping points are a long way off is beginning to look [unsafe](#). A recent paper warns that the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation – the system that distributes heat around the world and drives the Gulf Stream – may now be “[close to a critical transition](#)”. This circulation has flipped between “on” and “off” states several times in prehistory, plunging northern Europe and eastern North America into unbearable cold, heating the tropics, disrupting monsoons.

Other systems could also be approaching their [thresholds](#): the West and East Antarctic ice sheets, the Amazon rainforest, and the Arctic tundra and boreal forests, which are rapidly losing the carbon they store, driving a spiral of further heating. Earth systems don't stay in their boxes. If one flips into a different state, it could trigger the flipping of others. Sudden changes of state might be possible with just [1.5C or 2C](#) of global heating.

A common sign that complex systems are approaching tipping points is rising volatility: they start to [flicker](#). The extreme weather in 2021 – the heat domes, droughts, fires, floods and cyclones – is, frankly, terrifying. If Earth systems tip as a result of global heating, there will be little difference between taking inadequate action and taking no action at all. A miss is as good as a mile.

So the target that much of the world is now adopting for climate action – net zero by 2050 – begins to look neither rational nor safe. It's true that our only hope of avoiding catastrophic climate breakdown is some variety of [net zero](#). What this means is that greenhouse gases are reduced through a combination of decarbonising the economy and drawing down carbon dioxide that's already in the atmosphere. It's too late to hit the temperature targets in the Paris agreement without doing both. But there are two issues: speed and integrity. Many of the promises seem [designed to be broken](#).

At its worst, net zero by 2050 is a device for shunting responsibility across both time and space. Those in power today seek to pass their liabilities to those in power tomorrow. Every industry seeks to pass the buck to another industry. Who is this magical someone else who will suck up their greenhouse gases?

Their plans rely on either technology or nature to absorb the carbon dioxide they want to keep producing. The technologies consist of carbon capture and storage (catching the carbon emissions from power stations and cement plants then burying them in geological strata), or [direct air capture](#) (sucking carbon dioxide out of the air and burying that too). But their large-scale use is described by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as “[subject to multiple feasibility and sustainability constraints](#)”. They are unlikely to be deployed at scale in the future for the same reason that they’re not being deployed at scale today, despite 20 years of talk: technical and logistical barriers. Never mind: you can keep smoking, because one day they’ll find a cure for cancer.

So what’s left is nature: the capacity of the world’s living systems to absorb the gases we produce. As a report by ActionAid points out, there’s not enough land in the world to [meet the promises](#) to offset emissions that companies and governments have already made. Even those who own land want someone else to deal with their gases: in the UK, the National Farmers’ Union is aiming for [net zero](#). But net zero commitments by other sectors work only if farmland goes sharply net negative. That means an end to livestock farming and the restoration of forests, peat bogs and other natural carbon sinks. Instead, a mythical other will also have to suck up emissions from farming: possibly landowners on Venus or Mars.

Even when all the promised technofixes and offsets are counted, current policies commit us to a [calamitous 2.9C](#) of global heating. To risk irreversible change by proceeding at such a leisurely pace, to rely on undelivered technologies and nonexistent capacities: this is a formula for catastrophe.

If Earth systems cross critical thresholds, everything we did and everything we were – the learning, the wisdom, the stories, the art, the politics, the love, the hate, the anger and the hope – will be reduced to stratigraphy. It’s not a smooth and linear transition we need. It’s a crash course.

George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist

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Opinion[September 11 2001](#)

‘Blacklisting’ terrorist groups: the post-9/11 strategy that only serves to prolong wars

[Sophie Haspeslagh](#)



Taliban fighters celebrate the military takeover of Afghanistan. ‘Their return to power is just one example of how this heavy-handed anti-terror strategy failed.’ Photograph: Javed Tanveer/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 9 Sep 2021 04.34 EDT

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the United States spearheaded an international campaign to contain the threat from militant groups, like al-Qaida, by encouraging states to blacklist “terrorist” groups. Perhaps the most significant part of this effort was the passing of the [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373](#) (UNSC 1373), on 28 September 2001. Twenty

years later, [the return to power of the Taliban](#) in Afghanistan is just one example of how this heavy-handed anti-terror strategy failed.

The global blacklisting regime has not only failed to contain the [Taliban](#) but it has also made it harder to end wars across the globe. Resolution 1373 encouraged member states to set up their own blacklists to sanction the support of terror groups. But in the absence of a UN definition of what actually constitutes “terrorism”, the resolution led to states identifying suspects in light of their own national interests. Beyond al-Qaida and the Taliban, armed groups as diverse as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc), the Communist Party of Nepal, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in Turkey, the Communist Party of the Philippines and Hamas in Palestine were listed as terrorists.

States had been designating terror groups for decades, of course, but being labelled as such took on a whole different meaning following 9/11. UNSC 1373 was the first legally binding UN security council resolution to address international terrorism as a global phenomenon with no reference to a particular state or region, imposing a blanket mandatory sanctions regime on all terrorists. It was also the first time the right to self-defence had been invoked in the context of violence by a non-state actor.

Ultimately, the resolution furthered the sense that one side in conflicts – the non-state actor – is illegitimate and violent, and the other side – the state – is legitimate and should be unquestionably supported in its fight against “terrorists”.

In Colombia this framing deeply affected people’s perceptions of one another in the context of the civil war. One civil society activist that I spoke to recalled the moment when a bounty was offered for the severed hand of [Mono Jojoy](#), a member of the Farc Secretariat. This intense dehumanisation and polarisation continued to have an impact during the negotiations and beyond. It was ultimately by distancing itself from the terrorist tag that the Colombian government put in place what might be described as a “linguistic ceasefire”, which helped get negotiations off the ground. But the terrorist label stuck, and it made any negotiated agreement very hard to sell to the public at large, resulting in the rejection of the peace plan in a referendum in

October 2016.

The post-9/11 blacklisting regime has made the possibility of peace harder – we might even ask whether something like the [Good Friday agreement](#) would have been possible had negotiations been conducted in the 2000s. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) had, after all, been listed as a terrorist organisation by the United Kingdom since 1974, even though it was not listed internationally. In fact, much international involvement in the Good Friday agreement in 1998, particularly from the United States, was very supportive of negotiating with the IRA. As a number of mediators involved in negotiation attempts pre- and post-9/11 have said – what was possible then is no longer possible now.

And while before 9/11 the argument could be made that particular non-state armed groups should be considered as insurgents, or fighting for self-determination, today they are all just “terrorists”. This includes social and political organisations with no links to violent actions, as seen in Spain’s Basque country, where youth and cultural associations have been blacklisted, and more recently in the Philippines, where President Rodrigo Duterte pushed through a controversial anti-terrorism bill allowing even the mildest government critics to be labelled as such. In Egypt today human rights defenders, academics and even business owners are routinely accused of being part of terrorist organisations.

The terrorist tag is no longer just a label used by belligerents against each other; the whole international community has been standing behind this label for 20 years, with clear implications. Armed conflicts have been reshaped globally, pushing politics underground and raising the entry cost for dialogue and negotiations. It has encouraged a blunt-edged, security-oriented approach that allows little space to tackle the root causes of violence and has even lent targeted groups credibility as resistance movements. Armed organisations such as Al-Shabab and Hamas have used the labelling strategically to raise their status within their constituency and enhance their perceived victimhood.

Moreover, while the objective of blacklisting is to contain security threats, it has not succeeded in hurting listed armed groups in material terms. To be effective, policies would need to be tailored to specific local circumstances,

but these regimes stress uniformity. The anti-terror blacklisting mindset has also made international policy lose sight of a central conflict dynamic: state violence. Western governments and international organisations have found themselves aligned with and supporting dubious military and policing strategies, often accompanied by human rights violations, in the name of combating blacklisted groups. Accordingly, they end up pouring more fuel on the fire of such conflicts.

It is time to change this failed policy of blacklisting, which merges the actor and the act of terrorism. Instead of listing non-state armed groups, international policy should focus on criminalising the acts instead – both those of armed groups and those of the state. By doing this, and rejecting the go-to solution of dehumanising all groups and their supporters as “terrorists”, change – and thus peace – is put within closer reach.

Sophie Haspeslagh is an assistant professor in political science at the American University in Cairo. She is the author of [Proscribing Peace: How Listing Armed Groups Hurts Negotiations](#)

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[Opinion](#)[Afghanistan](#)

The Taliban takeover must not mean the end of international aid to Afghanistan

[Christopher de Bellaigue](#)



‘The needs of Afghanistan’s people, and the country’s capacity to send out ripples of instability, will continue to demand attention.’ Photograph: Aamir Qureshi/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 9 Sep 2021 05.39 EDT

Leaving is the easy bit. It’s the looking back that hurts. There was – as Joe Biden pointed out when announcing America’s defeat at the hands of the Taliban on 31 August – nothing “[low-grade or low-risk or low-cost](#)” about a 20-year deployment [that cost](#) the United States more than \$1tn and thousands of service personnel their lives, their limbs or their peace of mind. But it is disingenuous to claim, as the president also did, that closing the door on Afghanistan will miraculously free the US to deal with more pressing concerns such as China and Russia.

A humanitarian crisis looms over the country, caused in part by the abrupt halting of international aid after the Taliban takeover. Even now, despite the US retreat and the announcement by the regime, on Tuesday, of an [interim cabinet](#) that gives scant representation to the country's different ethnic groups and none at all to women or Shias, Afghanistan can't be forgotten. Its people's needs, and the country's capacity to send out ripples of instability, will continue to demand attention.

Until August, the US and others, including Britain and the EU, had donated tens of billions of dollars in development money to the country. Since the return of the Taliban to power, this aid has been cut off. The US also froze about [\\$9.5bn in Afghan assets](#) held in American banks.

Legally, the decision was justifiable; the Taliban remain under international sanctions. But morally and politically, it stank. The aid money that has now been stopped pays the bureaucrats, doctors and teachers who have given [Afghanistan](#) glimpses of a functioning society – the very people whom Biden promised to support even after withdrawal. And it is these Afghans who now face oblivion.

On 1 September, António Guterres, secretary-general of the United Nations, tweeted that basic services in Afghanistan are close to “collapsing completely”. There is no money for wages, food prices have soared and a run on the banks was only prevented by limiting weekly withdrawals to \$200. With [550,000 people displaced](#) by Taliban offensives this year alone, Covid-19 wreaking havoc – less than 3% of Afghans [have been vaccinated](#) – and the country suffering its worst drought in decades, the abrupt cessation of aid is more than the country can bear.

At the start of month, the US licensed its own contractors to send food and other essentials to the country. The EU and Britain are exploring the possibility of transferring emergency funds directly to NGOs on the ground, bypassing the [Taliban](#). The west is making the resumption of inflows for development – health infrastructure, for instance, or toilets for schoolgirls – conditional on the Taliban not only rejecting terrorism but also doing an about-face and espousing equal rights for women and religious minorities.

This might seem like a big ask for a theocratic organisation wedded to a medieval ideology and that, with the reported capture of the symbolically important [Panjshir valley](#), claims mastery over the whole country. But the US and its allies hold a precious card. The Taliban may be divided – between battle-hardened field commanders and their leaders who spent years in comfortable exile; between pragmatists who will tolerate girls attending school and hardliners who abhor the very notion – but on one thing they all agree, and that is that their revived emirate deserves international recognition.

The question now is whether Biden remains interested enough in Afghanistan, this faraway place of which Americans know little, to use his leverage effectively. Estrange himself irrevocably from the Taliban and they can reverse with impunity the tangible advances that Afghan society has made over the past 20 years. For support they will turn to China and Russia – both of which have maintained embassies in Kabul and also left their names off a recent UN security council resolution calling for the Taliban to form a broad-based government upholding human rights. For cash they will plant more poppy and to advance their agenda they will cooperate with al-Qaida and the more unsavoury elements of Pakistan's security apparatus.

Each crisis in this landlocked country begets one abroad. Memories of the Syrian refugee influx of 2015 lie behind the [EU's anticipated offer](#) of €600m (£515m) for Afghanistan's neighbours towards hosting the refugees who are expected to stream out of the country. "Building a moat," as one Afghan NGO leader told me, "to stop them heading west."

Time is of the essence if the immediate balance of payments crisis is not to balloon into a catastrophe. The Americans and Europeans must exploit every legal loophole to get aid into the country. In this they will find willing partners in those international NGOs that enjoy highest prestige among ordinary Afghans, and which, through judicious handling of Taliban officials in the country's far-flung provinces, enjoy cooperative relationships with its new rulers.

This is the kind of aid that works: projects like those of the Aga Khan Development Network, the Bangladeshi NGO Brac and the International Rescue Committee that pride themselves on assisting Afghans to meet their

own demands – for piped water, for instance, a clinic for young mothers, or a fruit tree nursery – employing mainly locals, watchful of waste and corruption, and working with whoever is in power.

With the Taliban's leaders, the US and its allies must use the tantalising prospect of legitimacy – not recognition; it is too early for that – to exact more than the vague promises of a free media, women's rights and respect for minorities they have received to date.

The Afghan regime that fell last month was a kleptocracy that has cleared out with its loot. The Taliban's new regime will be horrendous in other ways. But it controls the country, it needs money and legitimacy, and its behaviour can be influenced. That, as Biden surveys an old, wrecked policy and reluctantly contemplates a new one, is a start.

- Christopher de Bellaigue is an author and journalist. His forthcoming book, *The Lion House*, is the first in a trilogy about Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent
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[Opinion](#)[Foraging](#)

In search of a marvellous meat-free treat? I have found the perfect fungus

[Adrian Chiles](#)



In Croatia, chicken of the woods is associated with willow trees, but in the UK it is often found growing on oaks. Photograph: Nature Picture Library/Alamy

Thu 9 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

I have an excellent mushroom supplier in Croatia. Her name is Meri and she is well into her 70s. It's really good gear she gets me, I promise you. I would put you in touch, but I want to keep this precious source to myself. These aren't magic mushrooms, by the way, but these mushrooms are magic. They have a texture as meaty as any meat I remember eating back when I ate meat. They are known as *vrbovača* after the (willow) tree they grow on. She buys them in the spring in Osijek, in eastern Croatia, freezes them and brings them to the coast in the summer.

I always assumed these were a little-known local secret, but it turns out these devastatingly delicious things are everywhere, which begs the question: why aren't we eating them all the time? *Laetiporus sulphureus* is, strictly speaking, a bracket fungus, and it is more commonly known as chicken of the woods. I have only ever come across it once in the UK, as a starter in a fancy restaurant in west London. I was disappointed with the tiny threads I was served; my Meri's *Laetiporus sulphureus* are bigger than the plate this starter was served on.

Once a year, in Croatia, is much less often than I want to eat these miracles. I was therefore delighted to read on the Woodland Trust's website that the species is common in the UK, growing mainly on oak trees but also on the trunks of yew, cherry, sweet chestnut and willow from late spring to autumn. There are some grave warnings of the possible consequences of eating the ones that grow on yew trees, let alone any other species I would surely pick in error, but if you can find an expert to find some for you, my strongest advice is to give them a try. For me, next summer feels an awful long way away.

Adrian Chiles is a Guardian columnist.

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[China](#)

China property market rocked as Evergrande struggles to repay \$300bn debts



A woman walks past an advertisement for a property development by Evergrande in Emerald Bay in Hong Kong. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

[Martin Farrer](#) and agencies

Thu 9 Sep 2021 04.03 EDT

Shares in the embattled Chinese property giant Evergrande have slumped again after two credit downgrades in as many days amid concerns that it will default on parts of its massive \$300bn debt pile.

Evergrande, which is one of the world's most indebted companies, has seen its shares tumble 75% this year. They fell by almost 10% on Thursday morning before recovering on reports that the authorities may allow the company to reset its debt terms.

Trading in one of the company's bonds was suspended by the Shenzhen stock exchange after the price dropped 20%. After resuming trade, Evergrande's January 2023 bond fell more than 30%, triggering a second trading freeze.

The online market trading platform IG said Evergrande posed "a risk of contagion" after Bloomberg reported that Credit Suisse and Citibank were no longer accepting the bonds of another highly indebted Chinese property developer, Fantasia, as collateral.

China Evergrande Property: 3.41 -8.09% pic.twitter.com/c5P4qWARst

— IGSquawk (@IGSquawk) [September 9, 2021](#)

There were also reports from China on Wednesday of [employees protesting outside the company's offices](#) about salaries not being paid. Evergrande claims to employ 200,000 people and indirectly generate 3.8 million jobs in China.

The company has run up liabilities totalling more than \$300bn, after years of borrowing to fund rapid growth and a string of real estate acquisitions as well as other assets including a [Chinese football team](#).

But the firm has struggled to service its debts and a crackdown on the property sector by Beijing has made it even harder to raise cash, fuelling concerns it will go bankrupt.

The value of new home sales has fallen 20% in [China](#) since the peak in the first three months of this year, and the value of land sales are also sharply down. Along with Beijing's tougher regulation, these factors have made it much harder for Evergrande to dispose of unsold properties even with huge discounts.

Investors questioned how Evergrande was going to dispose of assets in order to repay debts without a clear plan.

"There is a lack of confidence and lots of rumours, the key is that we still don't see a clear [debt resolution] plan," a stock exchange trader told

Reuters.

On Tuesday, a stock exchange filing showed that Evergrande had outstanding liabilities worth 562m yuan (\$87m) to a supplier called Skshu Paint and repaid some of the money in the form of apartments in three unfinished property projects.

Xi Jinping, China's president, has targeted "[“unsustainable” economic growth](#)" in recent months, along with his drive against the country's increasingly powerful tech billionaires. The assault intensified on Thursday, after Chinese authorities told gaming firms to curb "incorrect tendencies" such as focusing "only on money" and "only on traffic", sending the Hong Kong stock market down 2.3%, its biggest one-day percentage drop since July.

But whether the president would allow Evergrande to go bust if it fails to meet key repayment deadlines on 21 September remains unclear.

Many analysts warn such an event could have a serious impact on the world's number two economy because the firm would go under, leaving hundreds of firms out of pocket.

Evergrande is China's second biggest property developer and has interests in hundreds of cities, specialising in the vast apartment complexes that have sprung up across China in the past 25 years.

Its debts to all manner of companies throughout China means that any default could trigger a knock-on effect for the country's real estate sector, which has been pumped up by ultra-cheap money since the global financial crisis in 2008-09. Investors fear that if Evergrande is allowed to go under, indebted rivals such as Fantasia could quickly follow.

Those worries were increased on Wednesday when Fitch cut its rating on Evergrande to CC, reflecting its view that "a default of some kind appears probable".

"We believe credit risk is high given tight liquidity, declining contracted sales, pressure to address delayed payments to suppliers and contractors, and limited progress on asset disposals," said a Fitch Ratings statement.

The move came a day after Moody's slashed its rating, indicating it is "likely in, or very near, default", while Goldman Sachs has cut the stock from neutral to sell.

Last week, the group said its total liabilities had swelled to 1.97tn yuan (\$305bn) and warned of risks of defaults on borrowings.

It issued [a profit warning](#) at the end of August in which it admitted that it could default on debt payments. The warning came days after Xu Jiayin, the billionaire founder of Evergrande Group and the third richest person in China, [resigned as chairman of its real estate arm](#).

In the latest indication of the company's funding challenges, financial information provider REDD reported on Wednesday that the company would suspend interest payments due on loans to two banks on 21 September.

James Laurenceson, director of the Australia-China Relations Institute, said Evergrande could be forced into a fire sale but cautioned that the sheer size of the business meant that the situation might not be as dire as some imagined.

"It's always important when talking about debts to remember that the company also has assets. When you compare the two, the scale of the risk and the possibility of things spinning out of control are moderated.

"I'd be surprised if Xi allows a full-scale bailout, but you have to see it in the context of a \$14tn economy."

Tiananmen Square protests 1989

Hong Kong police raid Tiananmen massacre museum



Police collect an exhibition board from the June 4th Museum, which commemorates the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

[Helen Davidson in Taipei](#)

[@heldavidson](#)

Thu 9 Sep 2021 03.29 EDT

Hong Kong authorities have raided the city's Tiananmen massacre museum a day after arresting four members of the civil society group that ran it.

The raid is the latest act by police in a sweeping crackdown on dissent and civil society groups that do not toe a pro-Beijing line, and came on the same day 12 activists pleaded guilty over a banned Tiananmen vigil last year.

The June 4th Museum, which has for two years displayed information and historical items related to the massacre of student protesters in Beijing on 4 June 1989, is run by the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, which has been [accused of foreign collusion](#) under the national security law.

On Thursday morning police officers were pictured carrying dozens of blue metal tubs into the museum's Mong Kok building. Local media filmed officers removing items and loading them into a truck, including exhibit display panels and large cardboard cutouts.

警方在六四紀念館撿走多個展板，包括支聯會已故創辦人司徒華、前中共領導人趙紫陽及民主女神像的展板。
pic.twitter.com/eeorO5Ot9j

— 罢新聞 CitizenNews (@hkcnnews_com) [September 9, 2021](#)

The museum first opened a permanent exhibit in 2014 and closed a little over two years later, reportedly due to pressure from the building's owners. In April 2019 it reopened at a new location in Mong Kok.

But it has been shut since June, when police announced an investigation into claims it was operating without the appropriate licence, three days after it had opened a new exhibition attended by hundreds of people. At the time, the Alliance said it was closing to ensure the safety of the public and its staff, and that if it reopened it would be separated from the Alliance [to operate independently](#).

Authorities have accused the 32-year-old Alliance, which also ran Hong Kong's annual candlelit vigil, of foreign collusion. Four senior leaders – the vice-chair Chow Hang-tung and standing committee members Simon Leung, Tang Ngok-kwan and Chan To-wai – were [arrested on Wednesday](#) for refusing to hand over information about the group's membership and finances.

The US and UK governments condemned the arrests. The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said the arrests were politically motivated and “a

blatant abuse of power”.

The UK foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, said the arrests were “another chilling demonstration of how the national security law is being used by Beijing to dismantle civil society and stifle political dissent in Hong Kong”.

The alliance [had already scaled down](#) in an attempt to protect itself from persecution. [Lee Cheuk-yan and Albert Ho](#) are among numerous high-profile activists serving prison terms over their roles in the 2019 pro-democracy protests that roiled Hong Kong, and on remand for other charges.

At the time police raided the museum, a group of 12 people, including the former alliance vice-chair Ho, appeared in court, pleading guilty to charges relating to the 2020 vigil, which had been banned by authorities citing the pandemic.

“Why did [the Alliance] still continue to commemorate June 4? In short, it is due to the moral commitment and conscientious duty willing to be taken by the Hong Kong people,” Ho told the court during mitigation, according to local media.

“In the mainland, open discussion of June 4 has always been forbidden in the public arena ... On the other hand, in this small city of Hong Kong, we speak as the conscience for the whole nation, protect the truth of history and the dignity of the people.”

Eight other people involved in the same case, including jailed Apple Daily founder Jimmy Lai, and Alliance vice-chair Chow, had earlier pleaded not guilty, and their trial was set for 1 November, RTHK reported.

The two groups were among [25 people charged on August 2020](#) for charges relating to participating in an unauthorised assembly, when the banned vigil partially went ahead. Three others, including jailed activist Joshua Wong, were earlier sentenced to between four and 10 months, while warrants are still outstanding for two activists who have since left Hong Kong – Nathan Law and Sunny Cheung.

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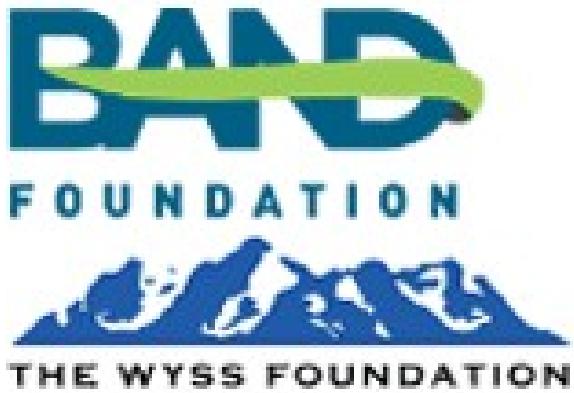
The age of extinctionBiodiversity

France threatened with legal action over use of pesticides



A campaign in Paris earlier this year highlighting the threat of neonicotinoids on bees. Photograph: Gonzalo Fuentes/Reuters

The age of extinction is supported by



About this content

Phoebe Weston in Marseille

@phoeb0

Thu 9 Sep 2021 04.30 EDT

The French government is being threatened with court action by two NGOs who accuse it of failing to meet its obligations to protect nature.

Notre Affaire à Tous and Pollinis have issued an ultimatum to the French state for failing to tackle the biodiversity crisis by implementing adequate laws and regulations. The announcement was made at the IUCN world conservation congress in the French port of Marseille and will be followed by a civil disobedience rally.

They argue the state has allowed widespread use and marketing of pesticides that harm wildlife. They are focusing on the use of neonicotinoids – banned in the EU but authorised under specific conditions in France – and glyphosate, which when used in weedkillers has been linked to killing insects and cancer in humans.

By allowing the systematic use of these chemicals, the French state has failed its duty of care to the country's wildlife, the two NGOs argue. The

state must adopt a rigorous and efficient pesticide registration process, and also reexamine marketing rules within the next two months, campaigners say.

Julie Pecheur of Pollinis said: “There is now a scientific consensus on the role played by conventional farming and the use of pesticides in biodiversity erosion.

“Civil society has been trying for decades to pass on this expertise to the authorities and offer solutions, in vain. The law must now intervene. The 19th century saw the birth of human rights; the 20th century saw the birth of social rights; the 21st century must be the century of the rights of nature.”

Cécilia Rinaudo, executive director at Notre Affaire à Tous, said: “It is time for the French government to be held accountable for the collapse of the living world and to respect its commitments.”

Like many countries, [France](#) has signed international treaties stating its ambition to tackle the catastrophic loss of wildlife. The French ministry of ecology has said it is necessary to “make the protection of biodiversity one of the priorities of major public policies”.

However, the NGOs argue, the state’s actions have been inadequate.

Nicolas Laarman, managing director of Pollinis, said: “Despite all the talk and despite national, European and international laws and conventions, the French government has failed to set up a pesticide approval system that truly protects pollinators and wildlife in general.

“The figures of the current collapse are appalling. This generalised decline in biodiversity will have dramatic consequences on the balance of life and threatens the future of the next generations.”

Scientists have repeatedly shown a link between the widespread use of pesticides on agricultural land and the loss of pollinators, [which are essential to so many food chains](#). This is believed to be a leading cause of insect losses worldwide – along with the destruction of wild areas. Last year, a

global study showed insect numbers had dropped by almost 25% in the last 30 years.

EU members banned neonicotinoids on crops in 2018 because of the damage they do to bees, but some countries have subsequently allowed them to be used in specific situations.

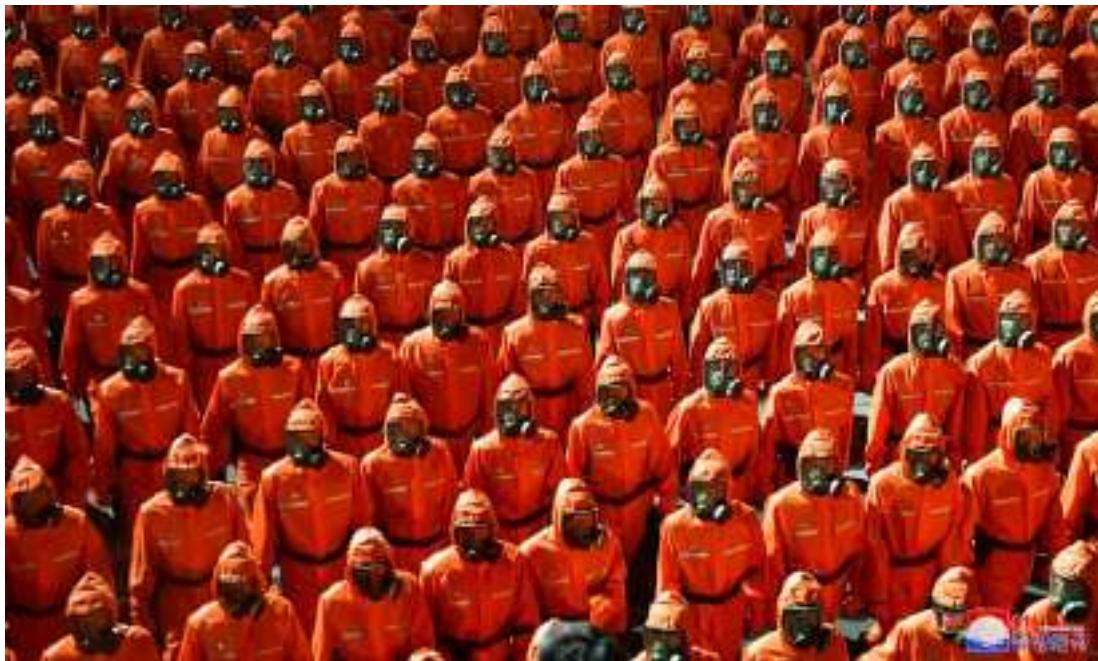
During the IUCN opening ceremony on Friday, Macron said he would use France's presidency of the EU in 2022 to push for change across the continent on the use of pesticides. He acknowledged an outright ban would be complicated but said he was working with farmers for reform.

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

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/09/campaigners-threaten-france-with-legal-action-over-use-of-pesticides-aoe>

[North Korea](#)

North Korea: soldiers in hazmat suits march in military parade marking nation's 73rd anniversary



North Korean personnel in hazmat suits march during a military parade overnight marking the nation's 73rd anniversary and reportedly attended by Kim Jong-un. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

Agencies

Wed 8 Sep 2021 23.55 EDT

North Korea paraded goose-stepping soldiers but no ballistic missiles in its capital overnight, in a celebration of the nation's 73rd anniversary that was overseen by leader [Kim Jong-un](#), state media reported on Thursday.

The Korean Central News Agency said fighter jets flew in formation above the midnight parade at Kim Il-sung Square in Pyongyang and some

conventional weapons were on display, including multiple rocket launchers and tractors carrying anti-tank missiles.

But no ballistic missiles were seen or mentioned in the reports, and Kim did not deliver any speech, [unlike last October](#) when he boasted of the country's nuclear capabilities and showcased previously unseen intercontinental ballistic missiles during a pre-dawn military parade.

The Rodong Sinmun newspaper published a photo of Kim, wearing a cream suit, waving from a balcony towards the assembled troops and spectators.

North Korea often celebrates major state anniversaries by displaying thousands of goose-stepping troops and its most advanced military hardware in parades at Kim Il-sung Square, named after Kim's state-founding grandfather.

State television had not broadcast footage of the parade, which included marchers wearing orange hazmat suits. Previous nighttime parades have not been aired live, but taped broadcasts were shown on state TV hours later.



Kim Jong-un waves to the crowds at the parade. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

KCNA's report came hours after South Korea's joint chiefs of staff said they were closely monitoring the North after detecting signs of a military parade.

The network later reported that members of the 5.7 million strong Worker-Peasant Red Guards took part in the march. It was the first time since 2013 that North Korea has staged a parade with the force, which was launched as a reserve after the 1950-53 Korean war.

Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said the perceived absence of strategic weapons and the focus on public security forces showed Kim is focused on domestic issues such as Covid-19 and the economy.

"The parade seems to be strictly designed as a domestic festival aimed at promoting national unity and solidarity of the regime," Yang said.

"There were no nuclear weapons and Kim didn't give a message while being there, which could be meant to keep the event low-key and leave room for manoeuvre for future talks with the United States and South Korea."

Amid a stalemate in diplomacy with the US, Kim and his powerful sister, Kim Yo-jong, have emphasised North Korea will boost its nuclear deterrent and preemptive strike capabilities while demanding that Washington abandon its "hostile" policies – a reference to the US maintaining sanctions and refusing to accept North Korea as a nuclear power.

Experts say Kim is facing perhaps his toughest moment as he approaches a decade in rule, with North Korea maintaining a border lockdown indefinitely to keep out the coronavirus and no end in sight to international sanctions.



Troops at the parade in Kim Il-sung Square. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

Last month, Kim Yo-jong berated the US and South Korea for continuing their combined military exercises, which she said were the “most vivid expression of the US hostile policy”.

She and another senior North Korean official threatened unspecified countermeasures that would leave the allies facing a “security crisis”.

The allies say the drills are defensive in nature, but they have cancelled or downsized them in recent years to create space for diplomacy or in response to Covid-19.

- Reuters and the Associated Press contributed to this report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/09/north-korea-soldiers-in-hazmat-suits-march-in-military-parade-marking-nations-73rd-anniversary>.

[North Korea](#)

North Korea barred from competing at 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics



The IOC's suspension of North Korea from competing at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics marks a steep drop in the country's Olympic status since the 2018 Winter Games in South Korea. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

Associated Press in Geneva

Wed 8 Sep 2021 19.37 EDT

[North Korea](#) has been formally suspended from the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics by the IOC as punishment for [refusing to send a team to the Tokyo Games](#), citing the Covid-19 pandemic.

The [International Olympic Committee](#) president, Thomas Bach, said the North Korean national Olympic body would also now forfeit money it was due from previous Olympics. The unspecified amount – potentially millions of dollars – had been withheld because of international sanctions.

Individual athletes from [North Korea](#) who qualify to compete in Beijing could still be accepted by a separate decision in the future, Bach said.

The suspension on Wednesday marks a steep drop in North Korea's Olympic status since the 2018 Winter Games in South Korea, where the IOC tried to aid a diplomatic breakthrough.

Athletes from the Korean neighbours [marched together in the opening ceremony](#) at Pyeongchang and joined together in a women's ice hockey team.

North Korea withdrew its team in April from the Tokyo Olympics citing a need to protect athletes from the "world public health crisis caused by Covid-19".

"They were violating the Olympic Charter and did not fulfil their obligation as stated in the Olympic charter to participate," Bach said at a news conference after an IOC executive board meeting.

The North Korean Olympic committee is suspended through 2022 and the exclusion could be extended, he said.

North Korea sent 10 competitors to the 2018 Winter Games, none in 2014 at Sochi, Russia, and two to Vancouver in 2010.

Asked what the IOC's message would be to countries like North Korea and Afghanistan – where women risk losing the right to play sports – Bach said taking part in the Olympics could "show to the world how it could look like if everybody would respect the same rules, if everybody would live together peacefully without any kind of discrimination".

Bach had earlier talked about the IOC supporting efforts to help athletes and officials leave Afghanistan with humanitarian visas and extending financial help for the country's potential Olympic competitors.

Less than five months from the start of the 2022 Winter Games, it was suggested to Bach that China's treatment of its Muslim minority Uyghur

people was also a humanitarian issue and not yet directly addressed by the IOC.

“There are limitations in our influence,” the IOC president said. “It’s to take care of humanitarian issues within the Olympic community. This is what we are doing.”

Bach was reluctant to comment on FIFA’s plan to play [men’s and women’s World Cups every two years](#), a move that would see soccer absorb billions of dollars more in commercial revenue and global media attention.

If FIFA can get its proposal approved, it would probably mean moving its marquee event to odd-number years to avoid a near-direct clash – including for broadcasters, sponsors and fans – with the Summer Games in 2028, 2032 and beyond.

“The potential consequences of such a move are becoming clearer day by day,” Bach said, adding he would “not put fuel to the fire” by speculating, though the IOC closely followed the talks and found them “interesting”.

He put his faith in “the contributions of the continental associations of FIFA” – an apparent reference to European soccer body UEFA, which has pledged to fight changing the World Cup’s quadrennial cycle.

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