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Opinion Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Dismissed as the unwanted Games, just how did these Olympics steal our hearts?

Emma John



Covid. No spectators. And yet Tokyo is not an absurd sideshow – it has only increased the awe we feel for the competitors



Bethany Shriever, who won BMX women's gold, and Kye Whyte, who took silver in the BMX men's event, celebrate in Tokyo. Photograph: Naoki Morita/Shutterstock

Bethany Shriever, who won BMX women's gold, and Kye Whyte, who took silver in the BMX men's event, celebrate in Tokyo. Photograph: Naoki Morita/Shutterstock

Sun 1 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

What's been the image of the Games for you so far? Is it Adam Peaty, smacking the water with an explosive mix of adrenaline and relief after taking the breaststroke gold that is his by right? Bethany Shriever, moments after winning her BMX final, struggling to sit upright on the track because she can't feel her legs? Or perhaps it's Tom Daley, leaping into the arms of his synchro partner, Matty Lee – an Olympic champion at last, 13 years after we watched the cute-kid version of himself debut in Beijing?

Memorable moments all and yet the sight that's going to stay with me, from this first week at least, is that of taekwondo world champion Bianca Walkden face down on the sparring mat. Walkden's just been through the

battle of her life against South Korean Lee Da-bin. She's come within a hair's breadth of disqualification, seen two video replay decisions go against her and then, having clawed her way back into the lead, her opponent has kicked her in the head at the very last second and stolen her spot in the final.

[Laura Muir's journey: from chasing lambs to racing for Tokyo 1500m gold](#)

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Walkden lies still, eyes open, not hurt, just finished. It is not always easy to connect with the world's greatest athletes, especially when they are performing in a distant time zone and they have achieved a variety of impossible things before you have even had your breakfast. But I see this woman half-spilling out of the octagon and I can read her thoughts. She's wondering why she should bother to pick herself up, whether there's any point. She might have been reigning world champion for the past six years, but right now she's not sure who she is at all.

That picture summed up the feel of these pandemic Olympics just as powerfully as the opening ceremony's blend of ethereal angst and minimalist restraint. London '48 gave us the "[Austerity Games](#)"; Melbourne '56 were the "Friendly Games"; these are the Existential Games, the What-Are-We-Even-All-Doing-Here? Games.

They're the Games we aren't expected to care about, the Games that perhaps shouldn't be happening. And they are offering a very different perspective on sport to the jingoistic one that Brits have become used to over the past decade.

Not that [Team GB](#) isn't winning medals, of course. Magic Monday triggered the hoped-for gold rush, and while Britain doesn't rule the waves on the rowing lake any more, it established a new sovereignty in the pool. But, for once, that doesn't seem the be-all. Because after the 16 months we've all just lived through, it's only natural to find oneself watching with an increased empathy and admiration for every competitor, wherever they finish.

What we see, in our sportspeople, are the same struggles and frustrations and heartbreak we've all been facing

In the pre-Covid age of Michael Phelps, Usain Bolt and Simone Biles, we focused our amazement on the superhuman abilities of these 21st-century athletes. But now we're in a world where nothing is normal, where illusions have been stripped away. Some of the defining stories from these Games will not be those of crowning triumph, but of surprise withdrawals and defeats – of [Dina Asher-Smith](#), of [Naomi Osaka](#), of [Biles](#) herself. It can be just as inspiring, in these circumstances, to watch someone finish third, fourth or nowhere.

Even silver medals, traditionally the worst colour to win, have gleamed unusually bright in Tokyo. Before they took gold in the triathlon mixed relay, [Alex Yee](#) and [Georgia Taylor-Brown](#) were both delighted with their second places in the men's and women's events respectively, having each overcome unexpected obstacles – a spectacular false start for Yee, a flat tyre for Taylor-Brown. Shortly after Taylor-Brown crossed the line, having overhauled three rivals in the final run, the cameras caught her cheerfully explaining her unexpected appearance to winner Flora Duffy.

It has been a peculiar privilege of these crowd-free Games to witness some absorbingly intimate moments between teammates and rivals. Vacant arenas, stand-less grounds and empty streets might be anathema to our TV screens, but they're not that unusual to the Olympians who, after all, spend most of their time training in front of no one at all. And while the stadiums and swimming pool may be empty, they have not been quiet. They have resounded with the cheers and screams of room-mates urging each other on.

[Praise and pain in another day of drama for Team GB's young squad](#)

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Stripped of their pageantry and paraphernalia, these have truly been the athletes' Games. After the French judoka Clarisse Agbénénou defeated her long-time Slovenian rival Tina Trstenjak, the latter having beaten Agbénénou to gold in 2016, the pair embraced like best friends who had been separated since the start of lockdown. When Colombian Mariana Pajón lost her Olympic crown to Shriever, we saw her shattered by the side of the track; minutes later, she was camera-bombing Shriever's interview with the Beeb.

The pandemic has offered us a timely and important perspective on sport. And not, perhaps, the same one that the International Olympic Committee is keen to offer, where billions of dollars are invested in a pop-up circus in a virus-ravaged city in the name of world peace. But one in which sport can be vastly entertaining and utterly inspiring – and ultimately unimportant. Where it matters most of all to the people who do it, not the people who pay for it.

Magic Monday may not have triggered a golden avalanche, and Britain's rowers may no longer rule the waves, but that's OK, because after the 16 months we've all had, we're not here for the baubles. What we see in our sportspeople are the same struggles and frustrations and heartbreak we've all been facing. What we find at these Games is sympathy, as we all strive towards the best that we can do, for now.

Walkden, by the way, picked herself off the mat. She came back and took bronze in her final match. "I just hope that the kids watching me can realise it's not about the colour," she said. "It's about giving your heart and soul and then being able to come out with your head held high."

Emma John's most recent book is Self-Contained: Scenes from a Single Life

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The Observer view on the Royal Navy's operation in the South China Sea

[Observer editorial](#)

Sailing into imperial delusions is no way to run foreign policy



China has said that aircraft carrier HMS Elizabeth's foray into the South China Sea could 'destabilise regional peace'. Photograph: Ana Brigida/AP

China has said that aircraft carrier HMS Elizabeth's foray into the South China Sea could 'destabilise regional peace'. Photograph: Ana Brigida/AP

Sun 1 Aug 2021 01.30 EDT

What would Jack Aubrey have made of it? When Patrick O'Brian's fictitious [Royal Navy](#) hero sailed HMS Surprise to the far side of the world, the enemy was the USS Norfolk, a lone American frigate marauding in the Pacific. Full speed ahead from the war of 1812, to 2021, and today's maritime sparring partners are HMS Queen Elizabeth, Britain's new £3bn aircraft carrier, and the Chinese People's Liberation Army navy and its 360 "battle-force" ships.

It's hardly an equal fight, though that would not have stopped Captain Aubrey. In any case, the government insists, slightly disingenuously, that it is not courting confrontation by parading modern-day gunboats under Beijing's nose. The defence secretary, Ben Wallace, says the aim is "fly the flag for Global Britain". Thus do deluded Brexiters spread their foolish, neo-imperial fantasies to points as distant as the hotly contested South China Sea.

Other reasons floated for this dangerous exercise include ensuring freedom of navigation in international sea lanes, coordinating operations with US and Nato allies and giving practical expression to Britain's strategic "tilt to Asia", as prescribed by the recent foreign and defence policy review. It's true China has been taking liberties, turning reefs and sandbars into heavily fortified, artificial islands while illegally claiming the South China Sea area as its own.

But it was inevitable that Beijing would view the Queen Elizabeth's foray, accompanied by a US destroyer, a Dutch frigate, and American F-35 combat aircraft, as a deliberately hostile, political provocation. It could "destabilise regional peace", a spokesman warned. Britain was once again attempting to "ship back fortune and treasures plundered in Asia", one commentator claimed.

Defence officials say the carrier strike group, the biggest naval force assembled since the Falklands war, will steer clear of the disputed Spratly and Paracel islands on its way north to Japan. But a lot could go wrong. Royal Navy vessels have a history of breaking down or running aground. An escort, HMS Diamond, a Type 45 destroyer, dropped out early on and sought repairs in Italy. And the Chinese military may decide to make a point of their own.

Latest reports say the Shandong, a Chinese aircraft carrier, is under way south of Hainan and could try to close on the British force. Analysts predict the navy's capabilities will be tested by Chinese surface ships, over-flights and submarines playing "cat and mouse". What if these high-risk games turn serious, by accident or design? Is Boris Johnson really ready for a head-on collision with China?

It's typical of this prime minister that he is prepared to take such a gamble with other people's lives. It is also deeply contradictory. In February, Johnson declared himself a "fervent Sinophile" keen to expand economic and trade links with Beijing. His government wrongly blocked a bid to give UK courts a say in determining if a state is committing genocide, as China is in Xinjiang.

Yet over the past year, Johnson has excluded Huawei from UK 5G markets, sought to reduce China's role in nuclear power projects and imposed sanctions over human rights abuses in Hong Kong. At the recent G7 summit, he signed up to Joe Biden's anti-Beijing "alliance of democracies" and is busily wooing India, China's rival. Now comes this navy lark. Exactly what is Johnson's China policy?

An even bigger question mark hangs over the still largely notional Asia-Pacific "tilt". At bottom, this wheeze is dictated and distorted by a desperate need for post-Brexit trade. Yet Asia is not the place where we live. For those who have forgotten, that place is Europe and the North Atlantic seaboard. Politically and economically diminished, Britain and its pared-back armed services cannot afford to play global policeman on the far side of the world, as the US defence secretary politely hinted last week. Nor should it try. There are more pressing challenges, such as Russia, much closer to home.

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OpinionEducation

The Observer view on the plight facing children post-Covid

Observer editorial

This is quickly becoming no country for young people



Friends at Whalley Range High School in Manchester getting their GCSE results in 2019. Results for this year's cohort are hedged around with uncertainty. Photograph: Mark Waugh/Alamy

Friends at Whalley Range High School in Manchester getting their GCSE results in 2019. Results for this year's cohort are hedged around with uncertainty. Photograph: Mark Waugh/Alamy

Sun 1 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

The prime minister has touted “[levelling up](#)” as the overarching theme of his domestic policy agenda. But in no area is the hollowness of this commitment revealed more than in relation to children and young people. Throughout this pandemic, the government has disregarded the young. At almost every turn, it has failed to put in place adequate measures to reduce the impact of Covid, which has been hugely disruptive to their education and wellbeing.

And so it continues, with the government washing its hands of any responsibility for ensuring this month's exam results are fair to young people, an ongoing lack of clarity about any requirement for university students to be double-vaccinated ahead of the start of term to attend in person and an ill-advised reform to vocational education that its own assessment says will disproportionately affect [young people](#) from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It was always going to be difficult to assess accurately and fairly young people's performance for the purpose of exam results, given how much school they have missed over the past 18 months. But the government has not taken the steps needed to avoid a repetition of last summer's chaos, when it insisted on using a crude algorithm to adjust teacher-assessed grades, then dropped the scheme altogether when it proved as problematic as education experts had warned it would be. This year, it has decided to push all the responsibility for allocating grades fairly on to schools and teachers, presumably to avoid the criticism it attracted last year. It has given contradictory messages to schools on how to do this: on the one hand, it says they should assess the standard at which pupils are actually performing despite the in-person teaching they have missed this year; on the other, it has created the expectation that the distribution of grades should be similar in 2021 to that of 2020, when there was significant [grade inflation](#). The government has produced no uniform way of moderating or anchoring grades. In doing so, it has created another system with huge potential for unfairness and an incentive for schools to inflate grades because they expect other schools to do the same.

Most worryingly, this system may further disadvantage young people from less affluent backgrounds who have suffered the greatest learning loss during the pandemic. New research from the Sutton Trust published last week shows that affluent parents have been more likely to [put pressure](#) on teachers to improve their children's exam grades. Some schools have been threatened with [legal action](#) by parents trying to secure the grades their children need to get into university. The government should have done more to build safeguards against this into the system, given that children from poorer backgrounds tend to do better in an exam-based system than one based on teacher assessment, and that the most selective universities are

expected to take [fewer young people](#) from disadvantaged backgrounds this year due to this group of young people being bigger than in previous years.

The government is compounding this with its foolhardy decision to scrap the majority of BTecs in favour of its preferred new vocational qualification, T-levels, a decision the former education secretary Kenneth Baker has described as “[an act of vandalism](#)”. BTecs are a relatively robust vocational qualification that help working-class students access higher education: almost half of white working-class young people who go to university have at least one BTec and 36% of black students who go to university have only BTecs. T-levels, which follow GCSEs and are equivalent to three A-levels, were only launched last year and are relatively untested. The abrupt phasing out of BTecs will only harm the prospects of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. And this comes when the government has resolutely failed to provide sufficient catch-up funding to close the widening gap opened up by the pandemic, such that it prompted its education recovery chief Sir Kevan Collins [to resign](#) in June, warning that it did “not come close” to what was needed. As a society, we continue to invest far more in young people who go to university than those who do not.

The government has also abandoned any leadership in relation to the university system. There has been no fee rebate for young people who have missed months of in-person teaching. Unsurprisingly, fewer than three in 10 students thought this represented [good value](#). Most universities will offer a blend of online and in-person teaching next year; there has been little discussion about [what this means](#) for students’ academic experience and wellbeing. Just weeks from the start of the autumn term, the government has yet to set out vaccine requirements for in-person teaching, including international students, and if the latter will need to pay to quarantine in hotels for 10 days should they arrive from red-list countries.

Last week, the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, announced the government would roll out a tiny pot of cash to trial the [teaching of Latin](#) in a handful of secondary schools. It is a gimmicky initiative designed to draw attention away from the government’s abject failure to do enough to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on children and young people. But no distraction technique can disguise the fact that the fundamental injustices in our education system are getting [progressively worse](#), with the gap in attainment

between children from richer and poorer backgrounds growing even further last year. This will affect the prospects of a whole generation for decades to come and the responsibility for that lies with no one other than this government.

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There's a case for vaccine passports, but ministers are failing to make it

[Andrew Rawnsley](#)



The government's hesitant and incoherent policy serves only to create suspicion and offer ammunition to anti-vaxxers

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The libertarian right and rightwing media exert a ‘gravitational pull’ on Boris Johnson. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AP

The libertarian right and rightwing media exert a ‘gravitational pull’ on Boris Johnson. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AP

Sun 1 Aug 2021 03.30 EDT

Many will have heard of Typhoid Mary, but fewer will know her full story – or her real name. That was [Mary Mallon](#), an Irish-born cook who worked for affluent families in the New York City area in the early years of the 20th century. She was employed by eight households, seven of whom contracted typhoid, a nasty bacterial infection that can be deadly. Whenever an outbreak began, she would usually leave without giving a forwarding address, not believing she could be spreading infection because she was never ill herself. The idea that people could carry a disease without displaying any symptoms was a novelty to the medical science of the era. So it took a lot of detective work and a long time before she was identified as what we might now call an asymptomatic super-spreader.

When she was finally tracked down in 1907, she was arrested as a threat to public health, forced into an ambulance by five policemen and sentenced to an enforced quarantine. Doctors discovered massive amounts of typhoid bacteria in her gall bladder. She rejected the suggestion that the infected

organ should be removed, the one operation that might have cured her. It was a risky procedure and Mary could not be convinced that she was a carrier.

The authorities of the day were divided about the ethics of imprisoning her. She was released after three years on condition that she would not work as a cook again and take reasonable steps to avoid infecting others with typhoid. She broke that pledge by taking employment, under false identities, in a number of kitchens in restaurants and hotels and, lastly, a hospital. It is thought she infected more than 100 people, but it can't be said precisely how many deaths she caused. Estimates range between three and 50. Rearrested in 1915, she was placed back in enforced quarantine on a small island in New York's East River. And that was where she spent the rest of a miserable life until she died 23 years later.

I begin with the story of Typhoid Mary because it is a vivid example of an individual's liberty coming into conflict with the safety of society when that individual poses a deadly threat to public health. How you react to her story may reveal your preferences when it comes to the argument over vaccine passports. If you think that it was appalling to force this woman into involuntary isolation, then I suspect you react negatively to the idea of placing restrictions on people who have refused to be fully vaccinated against Covid. If your sympathies are with the authorities who locked her up for the protection of the public, then I surmise that you will not quarrel with requiring people to get jabbed if they want to go to places and engage in activities where others will be present.

Some governments have already made their minds up and are legislating for vaccine passports. One of the strictest versions has just gone through France's legislature. It requires proof of vaccination or a recent negative Covid test to access a wide spectrum of venues. From early August, those who do not possess a *pass sanitaire* will be excluded from trains, planes, workplaces, restaurants, museums, cinemas and swimming pools. Protesters crying "Liberty!" have been on the streets. Emmanuel Macron [responded](#): "What is your freedom worth if you say to me, 'I don't want to be vaccinated', but tomorrow you infect your father, your mother or myself?"

There's the debate in a nutshell. One interpretation of liberty, which is solely focused on the rights of the individual, versus another, which pays respects to the rights of others not to have a disease inflicted on them by an unvaccinated carrier. To date, 13 European governments have already introduced, or will soon do so, a "[green pass](#)" of some kind. In every case, the plans have been followed by protests.

Britain is different. The opposition to the idea got angry before the government produced anything resembling either an argument for passports or a plan to introduce them. After initially ruling them out, ministers have hesitantly, haphazardly and rather stealthily crept towards embracing them. On "freedom day", Boris Johnson announced that people would need to prove their [vaccination status](#) to get into nightclubs from September. Shortly afterwards, Nadhim Zahawi, the vaccines minister, suggested that requirement would be expanded to cover a [broader range](#) of venues, including sports fixtures, music festivals and big exhibitions. Those going to this autumn's Conservative party conference, not an event noted for its youthfulness, will be required to prove their Covid status.

Ministerial announcements have generated swirls of suspicion about their motives because the government has never consistently articulated its case. Does it believe in passports as an effective tool for preventing infection and allowing as much opening up as possible? Or are ministers using them as a coercive stick to push more people to get themselves vaccinated? Dominic Raab, the foreign secretary, suggested that it was the latter when [he remarked](#): "It is a little bit of coaxing and cajoling."

Ministers have also exposed themselves to accusations that they are being sly. The NHS app was recently given an unannounced tweak to include a domestic Covid passport section. Trying to introduce them by stealth hands opponents more ammunition to complain that the whole idea is sinister.

On some of the most tricky issues around passports, the government is subcontracting decisions to others. On Friday, Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, said he supported companies that oblige staff to get vaccinated in order to return to the workplace. It was "a good idea", but not one that the government was going to turn into legislation. The strident opposition of a sizable chunk of Tory MPs means the government will struggle to get any

passport law through parliament without Labour support. Absent any law, what employers demand of their employees could vary wildly. The “no jab, no job” rule being implemented by some businesses, with the encouragement of government, has yet to be tested, as it surely will be, in employment courts.

Libertarian opposition to vaccine passports demands a fundamental right to endanger others

One reason for the unsteadiness of the government’s approach is that ministers are divided among themselves. Another is the opposition of the noisy libertarian right and the rightwing media, which exert a strong gravitational pull on Mr Johnson. The libertarians contend that vaccine passports will fundamentally compromise the freedom of the individual. They do raise ethical issues, which require a proper discussion, but the libertarians are wrong to suggest that the idea is so unthinkable it should not even be a subject of debate. As the challenges and concerns of societies change, so there is a constant adjustment of the boundary between individual freedoms and the responsibilities of the individual to the community in which they live. It used to be the case that you could drive without a seatbelt and while drunk. It used to be the case that you could smoke cigarettes in the office and the pub. When these harmful activities were first made illegal, there was ferocious opposition from libertarians on the grounds that prohibition was an unconscionable assault on individual freedom. No one now seriously argues that you ought to be free to risk the lives of others by drink-driving or puffing toxic fumes into a shared environment. Libertarian opposition to vaccine passports demands a fundamental right to endanger others. They want the freedom of John to refuse a vaccine to trump Joanna’s freedom to travel, work or enjoy her leisure time in safety.

As for Labour, its MPs are divided and its position unclear. Sir Keir Starmer has said that the issue is “really difficult” while remarking that “[the British instinct](#)” will be against passports, though polling actually suggests majority public support for them. Trade union leaders are hotly opposed to “no jab, no job” rules in the workplace. Many union members might take a different view about being obliged to work alongside vaccine refuseniks.

Sceptics ask good questions. What rules will apply for those who can't be vaccinated for health reasons? Will policing be effective and consistent? How vulnerable will passports be to cheating? There are legitimate anxieties, which the government has yet to answer.

The wrong way to try to introduce vaccine passports is in the incoherent and stealthy fashion recently displayed by ministers. The right way is to clearly articulate their case and demonstrate that the effort is worth the reward because they will make it safer to reopen and save lives.

Andrew Rawnsley is Chief Political Commentator of the Observer

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NotebookImmigration and asylum

The RNLI deserves better than Nigel Farage's contempt

Tim Adams



The rescue service has a long and glorious history of saving the lives of people, wherever they come from



In its 190-year history the RNLI has recorded rescuing 146,000 souls. Their nationalities are not logged. Photograph: Andrew Fosker/REX/Shutterstock

In its 190-year history the RNLI has recorded rescuing 146,000 souls. Their nationalities are not logged. Photograph: Andrew Fosker/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 31 Jul 2021 10.00 EDT

A couple of weeks ago, I was at Lizard Point in Cornwall. The old lifeboat station below Britain's most southerly cliffs has long since been replaced but the rusting structure remains, a stubborn legacy of heroism past. It was from here, in February 1907, that the biggest sea rescue in the history of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) was launched when the liner SS Suevic was thrown on to the jagged reef offshore in high winds and dense fog. For 16 hours, the lifeboat crews rowed out and rescued all 456 passengers (including 71 infants). The ethnicity or country of origin of those rescued was not recorded, as it has not been recorded for the 146,000 other lives saved during the RNLI's history.

There has been much talk in recent years of the relevance of some of our monuments to the past. The lifeboat stations that circle our coastline, crewed by volunteers and funded by charity, are living reminders of the humanitarian impulse that remains the best of us. Nigel Farage's attempts to undermine that spirit last week, by characterising boats saving drowning

refugees as a “[taxi service for migrants](#)”, went against everything that the Lizard lifeboat and all the other crews risk their lives for. The fact that [donations to the RNLI](#) are up 3,000% in the days since is a welcome indication that the spirit that sends those crews out is as appreciated now as it ever was.

Before his time



Prince: prophetic. Photograph: Kerem Yucel/AFP/Getty Images

The standard small-talk question to any journalist is: “Who’s the most memorable person you’ve ever interviewed?” My answer has remained unchanged for 20-odd years: it’s always been Prince, who I wrote about, appropriately enough, back in 1999. He was an authentic artistic genius, not only because of his effortless mastery of every instrument he picked up, but also in conversation, in which every answer came with many layers of playful self-awareness. At the time, he mentioned how he had thousands of tracks and songs in his vaults that had never been released. Since his death, in 2016, a few have emerged including, last week, [a whole album](#) made in 2010, *Welcome 2 America*.

Listening to it now, you wonder if he decided to archive the work because some of the songs sounded so cynical of the early days of the Barack Obama

presidency: “Hope and change, everything takes forever – the truth is a new minority,” he sings, presenting the US as still “land of the free, home of the slave”. A decade on, knowing what we know now, his sentiments sound more like prophecy: “The world is fraught with misin4mation,” he noted on the album. “George Orwell’s vision of the future is here. We need 2 remain steadfast... in the trying times ahead.”

There is a green hill...



The £2m Marble Arch mound, near London’s Hyde Park. Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

On Thursday, I went down to have a look at the [Marble Arch Mound](#), the fake hill in central London commissioned by Westminster council to entice shoppers back to Oxford Street. The designers of the £2m structure, the Rotterdam-based architects MVRDV, claim that their bizarre hillock will “open people’s eyes and prompt intense discussion” about the need for green spaces in cities. The discussion points that sprang to my mind were: a) why would paying [£4.50](#) to climb a steepish, muddy mound encourage people to go shopping?, and b) if you wanted to advertise the importance of green urban spaces, why not erect a signpost in the direction of Hyde Park, 20-odd yards away, the original (and free) model for city greenery? There has been

much talk of levelling up - the mound presents an irrefutable argument for levelling down.

- Tim Adams in an Observer columnist
-

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Opinion**GB News**

I've been watching Nigel Farage on GB News so you don't have to. Consider yourself lucky

Catherine Bennett



The struggling channel is more talked about than watched. The solution: a show from the ex-Ukip leader



Nigel Farage filming at Dover last summer: the RNLI received record donations after he called it a ‘taxi service’ for migrants last week.
Photograph: Will Oliver/EPA

Nigel Farage filming at Dover last summer: the RNLI received record donations after he called it a ‘taxi service’ for migrants last week.
Photograph: Will Oliver/EPA

Sat 31 Jul 2021 14.00 EDT

Nigel Farage may not be the best-loved emergency service, but as demonstrated by his recent work for GB News, the struggling, consciously patriotic news channel, he is always available, willing to take on jobs most broadcasters wouldn’t touch, and delivers reliably transformative effects.

Two weeks ago, [GB News](#) was considered merely unpleasant, unsuccessful and unwatchably amateurish. Now, with its new Farage programme on every day, it looks well placed to be far more intensely and widely disliked, including by those who haven’t seen the channel’s line in impartial headlines – “Cocky Forecasters”, “Freedom Farce” – and now never will. Though, after watching the channel last week, I can’t really think of this as – on their part – a loss.

With his description of the RNLI as a migrants’ “taxi service”, Farage has already supplied his trademark contaminant. The same instinct that saw him blemish, perhaps ineradicably, the reputation of LBC, ensured that what could have been an examination of the current demands on the RNLI shortly descended into a personal attack on a charity that has actually earned national gratitude and affection.

Anyone hoping to out-offend Farage will have to consider going for St John Ambulance or maybe a baby hedgehog sanctuary, Sir David Attenborough having already served his turn. A simple attack on, say, the Church of England, which, of course, Farage does attack, on account of woke bishops, could never have elicited the public reaction when he, near blasphemously and quite falsely, suggested his target was using sly PR tactics (“I wonder if the RNLI used the same PR firm as Harry and Meghan?”) to victimise him.

“So I’m the baddy who’s led to this horrible situation,” Farage said, before reminding his allegedly noble adversaries that Eternal Father Strong to Save would be no help whatsoever against him, Trump’s actual friend, someone who reportedly warbled Hitler Youth songs as a schoolboy: “I’ve fought bigger and uglier than you.” That would show the life-saving bastards.

The revulsion could be measured in record donations to the RNLI and in news stories publicising the arrival of Farage as lead guarantor of offensiveness on GB News.

The ‘woke mob’ has shown itself unresponsive to most GB taunting to a degree that might raise doubts about its malign reach

If that sounds like a minor challenge, Farage’s fellow provocateurs, from whose ranks Andrew Neil has recently disappeared, could confirm that winding up “the woke mob” (as presenter Dan Wootton terms people GB News disagrees with) is not just relentless – with outrage, like wind power, having to be constantly generated – but a good deal more difficult than it looks. Being reliably 100% odious might seem like the simplest thing in the world – slag off Simone Biles, ridicule quotas, net zero, Europeans, etc – but GB News is competing with experienced providers at, for example, the *Spectator*, the *Telegraph* and *Mail*, even at the *Times* and the BBC, the very

outfits the new broadcaster likes to denounce as timidly “mainstream”. What, shock-wise, is left for presenters who must compete with a mainstream-employed contrarian who [glories, on Twitter](#), in a young woman’s death?

GB News is further constrained, if it wants to outdo established irritants such as Giles Coren, Jonathan Sumption or Toby Young, by Ofcom’s rules on “due impartiality”. As much as it might enjoy the occasional attention-drawing reprimand, the news channel is required to offset, say, a climate-crisis denier with a respectable guest, although it elsewhere allows itself considerable freedom, particularly in US coverage. Farage misses his pal Trump and his famous (their ban is omitted) tweets. “We’ve got this guy Biden in,” he lamented last week, during a gloat about Joe Biden’s ratings with Ted Cruz, the anti-abortion Republican, “and now we don’t hear anything.”

Professor Neil Ferguson is another subject on which the presenters run free, with Michelle Dewberry, alumna of TV’s *The Apprentice* and former pro-Brexit candidate, rubbishing an unrepresented Ferguson and his modelling: “I sit here and I just say, enough.” Additional abuse came from Wootton, who is worth catching at least once for his ability, like a ventriloquist’s wicked doll, to deliver a stream of insults through permanently bared teeth: “The bloke is a charlatan.”

As for “the woke mob”, along with sufferers from a “metropolitan mindset”, it has shown itself unresponsive to most GB News taunting to a degree that might raise doubts about its malign reach and cohesion, were it not that a cowardly refusal to take on Wootton’s grin is precisely what you’d expect from a faction that thinks vaccine passports could be quite a good idea.

It might, however, have been predicted from a poll showing that anti-wokeness, a shibboleth so critical to GB News, seems to be only [patchily understood](#) by a public that refuses to organise itself along the tidy lines assumed by Neil when he pledged to “expose the growing promotion of cancel culture for the threat to free speech and democracy that it is”.

As if to confirm this difficulty, the first major cancel crisis at GB News came from within, when it had to cancel itself for letting Guto Harri – previously

masquerading as a trusted Boris Johnson apologist! – take a knee. As much as the step must have grieved this broadcaster, a sworn opponent of ideological “echo chambers”, Harri was instantly muted, with the new star, Farage simply re-promising “both sides of every argument”. This no doubt genuine offer still suffers, some viewers may think, from the presenters’ habit of depicting alternative views as the alien property of leftist propagandists or “woketopian snowflakes”, to the point, as above, of declaring war on a non-compliant charity.

Whether most of GB News’s guests – Farage’s have included the Conservatives Ann Widdecombe, Stanley Johnson, Graham Brady, Colonel Bob Stewart – only accidentally endorse, with uncanny regularity, the libertarian attitudinising of their hosts, or it’s just that nobody else will come on, the result threatens neither media echo chambers nor Farage’s trademark rants. On the contrary, those who should surely fear the impact of Farage, the hammer of unnecessary life-saving – with [Andrew Neil](#) perhaps having the most reputationally to lose – are those in peril on GB.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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Opinion[Afghanistan](#)

We failed so badly in Afghanistan. But to throw in the towel now would be an act of betrayal

[Dan Jarvis](#)

I lost my comrade Kevin in battle. His sacrifice must not have been in vain



A British army officer in Helmand province, Afghanistan, in 2012: 457 servicemen and women died because of the Afghan conflict. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

A British army officer in Helmand province, Afghanistan, in 2012: 457 servicemen and women died because of the Afghan conflict. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

Sun 1 Aug 2021 02.30 EDT

Was it worth it? That is what many of us who served in [Afghanistan](#) are quietly asking as we watch with bewilderment and horror at what is unfolding.

Four hundred and fifty-seven British servicemen and women never made it home from the war. Among them was Corporal Kevin Mulligan, a fearless young Scot with whom I had the honour of serving. He was the epitome of a paratrooper and one of our best and brightest commanders. At the time of his death, Kev's fiancee was carrying their unborn child. One of countless tragedies borne out of that bloody conflict.

It is impossible to quantify the price paid over the past 20 years but whenever I think about Afghanistan, the human cost is at the forefront of my mind. The pain felt by Kev's loved ones. The thousands of veterans who are today suffering terribly from the physical and mental effects of the campaign. And the millions of Afghans who have known nothing but violence and bloodshed their entire lives.

Good news has been in limited supply for decades but even by historical standards, the months since President Joe Biden announced the drawdown have been miserable for Afghanistan. Mass desertion by soldiers. US forces leaving a strategic base in the dead of night without informing their indigenous counterparts. Violence on the rise, including the monstrous bombing of Sayed al-Shuhada high school in Kabul that left 85 dead, an attack that contributed to civilian casualties reaching record levels. And this week, at least 80 people were killed in a flash flood in Nuristan province, pushing the country closer to the verge of a humanitarian crisis. The promise from Nato's chief of an "orderly, coordinated, and deliberate" withdrawal rings increasingly hollow.

What makes our failure such a bitter pill to swallow is that we knew about the flaws in our strategy all along. And yet we chose to do nothing about them.

We had one overarching goal in Afghanistan: to build a government that had the legitimacy, competence and means to survive without us. A government capable of mediating between competing political forces adequately enough to avoid major conflict would have provided us with an exit strategy. We failed in that pursuit because we never made it a serious objective.

There must be an active effort to engage regional players to support a settlement rather than fuelling deeper conflict

I saw first hand what corruption did to the Afghan security forces and to the political environment under which they operated. Political exclusion and impunity were rife and undermined faith in a fledgling democracy. That, in turn, drove people towards the insurgency and further fuelled conflict.

This was common knowledge but we did not tackle the underlying problems. Instead, we turned a blind eye to strongmen engaged in land grabs and murders, to a colossal bank fraud that threatened the entire economy and to widespread electoral fraud.

Lasting stability is impossible to achieve if your security forces and government institutions are corrupt, your elected leaders are subordinated to warlords and swaths of the population feel excluded from power. We were complacent and involved in a long-running conspiracy of optimism that the tide would turn, but it never did. Then, on realising the consequence of our strategy, we opted for abandonment. And nobody needs reminding what happens when Afghanistan is abandoned.

It is, however, only right to highlight the genuine progress that has been made, particularly on the rights of women and girls. Around two out five children now attending school are girls; 175 female judges have been appointed across the country; 25% of sitting MPs are women. Given where the country was in 2001, these gains are not to be sniffed at. But make no mistake, the return of a Taliban-led government would be catastrophic for women – provisions for their protection, education and health must be a long-term priority for the UK government.

Britain and its allies cannot be proud of where we have ended up. After two decades of a war that has left tens of thousands dead and cost the west trillions of dollars, we left without a peace deal in place and with the Taliban in ascendency. That is not what success looks like.

The effect of the intervention on Afghanistan and the wider region will take a generation to discern but its effect on us is already clear. We may never commit to a campaign on this scale again. In the near future, it is inconceivable that any government would propose it, let alone that the public would stand for it. Whatever the mistakes of the past, I still hold some hope for the future. The US decision to leave meant Britain could not have

feasibly stayed and staying without a coherent strategy would not have helped anyway. But we still retain influence, even at this 11th hour. The question is whether the government is willing to wield that influence in a way that successive administrations have failed to.

First, we must back the Afghan government – however flawed, it is the only show in town. Second, our support should be made much more conditional on better governance and respect for human rights. Third, we need to do whatever we can to facilitate the peace process. And finally, there must be an active effort to engage regional players to support a settlement rather than fuelling deeper conflict. This will involve compromise, some of it unpalatable, but pursuing a lasting peace should be our only objective.

So, was it worth it? If Afghanistan continues on its current trajectory, then my honest but heartbreakin answer is no.

I want nothing more than to be proved wrong. I want the Afghan security forces to beat back the insurgents. I want the government to agree a peace accord on its terms. I want the country to turn the page on 40 years of conflict so its people can finally prosper. Ultimately, I want the sacrifices made by Kev and everyone else to mean something.

Afghanistan's fate is not yet sealed. It has been clear for some time that a military victory is not possible but that does not mean now is the time to throw in the towel. If we do, it will not only represent a betrayal of our own interests and sacrifices, but of the Afghans.

Dan Jarvis is the Labour MP for Barnsley Central, mayor of South Yorkshire and a former [British army](#) major.

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Names in the news[Simon Cowell](#)

Pop maestro Simon Cowell finally bows to the public's resounding 'no' vote

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



The X Factor won't be returning to our screens. It had long outstayed its welcome



Simon Cowell, who has given up on The X Factor, with Nightbirde on America's Got Talent 2021. Photograph: NBC/Getty Images

Simon Cowell, who has given up on The X Factor, with Nightbirde on America's Got Talent 2021. Photograph: NBC/Getty Images

Sat 31 Jul 2021 12.30 EDT

Like a knackered old cruise singer who has finally decided that this cover of Make You Feel My Love will be, must be, their last, *The X Factor* has slunk offstage for good.

The talent show has not been on air since 2018 but, last week, ITV confirmed that, after 17 years, it was [a no from the channel](#) and there are no plans to bring it back. Reports suggest that its creator and overlord, Simon Cowell, pulled the plug to prevent it becoming “a joke”, which makes me think Cowell has not been on the internet in the past decade.

Apart from the fact that it is pub-quiz-tiebreaker-tough to name anyone who has taken part in the show since 2012, it is a sign of how rapidly and dramatically the cultural climate has changed that it is impossible to imagine *The X Factor* on television now.

For years, it ran a well-oiled machine for churning out pop stars and Christmas number ones, but the early stages of each series, in which members of the public could put themselves forward for auditions, sorted the wheat from the chaff with a sneer.

I don't think it belongs on the flaming pyre of the culture wars, and plenty of shows had a similar energy, but it is a relief to realise that laughing at people who aren't in on the joke just isn't that funny any more. If kids would rather find their idols from a creatively edited or intricately choreographed clip on TikTok, for example, then I don't think that is a bad thing. [Audiences have moved on](#).

Cowell and the series' status as kingmakers has long since declined. There are far fewer gatekeepers to new music now. I remember chatting to a big pop songwriter a couple of years ago, about how fans like to find music for

themselves: he argued that they don't like to have it shoved down their throats any longer.

A label might dictate what a single is going to be, but, often, it's the fans who decide what the hit is. To quote Michael Gove, wildly out of context: pop fans have had enough of experts.

The X Factor attempted to evolve with the tried-and-tested format of a celebrity spin-off, and a strange, truncated, updated version of *Popstars: The Rivals*, but the love wasn't there for either of them. Instead, we got Little Mix doing kindness on BBC One and *The Voice* having a laugh with Tom Jones on ITV. These shows did not forge stars either, but at least they felt good.

Jodie Whittaker will be a hard act to follow



Jodie Whittaker: farewell to the first female Time Lord. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

After months of rumours, and setting up the promise of many more months of rumours about who will replace her, Jodie Whittaker has [confirmed that she will leave](#) *Doctor Who* at the end of 2022.

Whittaker will depart after one more series and three specials. “I will carry the Doctor and the lessons I’ve learnt for ever,” she said. The current showrunner, Chris Chibnall, will leave with her, after revealing that the pair always had a “three-series-and-out pact”.

I remain a casual *Doctor Who* viewer, dipping in and out, but I haven’t felt so fondly towards a Doctor since David Tennant, to whom Whittaker came only second in a 2020 *Radio Times* poll of fans’ favourite Time Lords.

While debate raged around whether the show was “too woke” or “not woke enough” – there were very strong feelings on both sides, considering that it is a show largely aimed at younger viewers – I thought Whittaker was a charming Doctor and the fact of her being the first woman to take on the role meant a great deal to many, particularly younger, female fans.

Still, every regeneration brings with it a special sort of excitement and anticipation. As a broad concept, though, a [rebooted show is starting to feel lazy](#); there are plenty of TV revivals at the moment that nobody really asked for – *Gossip Girl*, here’s looking at you. But with *Doctor Who*, a reboot is built into the fabric of the show and it has always benefited from change. I salute the Whittaker era and look forward to seeing who is next.

DaBaby: costly rap for anti-gay rapper



DaBaby: not laughing now. Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

The rapper DaBaby has had a peculiar week after he made a bizarre homophobic announcement at a festival in Miami, asking fans to put their phone lights in the air, but not men who were HIV positive or gay men who had sex in car parks.

I am not sure what his intention was – surely if he was so afraid of gay men, it would be easier to see them with their lights on – but he added that HIV would “make you die in two or three weeks”.

The [backlash was swift](#) and A-list, as Elton John, Madonna and Questlove formed a chorus of music giants condemning his ignorance.

It is strange, not least because [DaBaby](#) has pursued the pop dollar with verses for Justin Bieber and Dua Lipa and pop is not always an aggressively heterosexual market.

“I’m surprised and horrified at DaBaby’s comments,” Lipa said on Instagram. BoohooMAN, with whom he collaborated on a clothing line, said that it would no longer work with him.

DaBaby eventually sort of denied being homophobic. “But the LGBT community... I ain’t trippin on y’all, do you. y’all business is y’all

business,” he tweeted, perhaps aware that it is his business now.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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Observer lettersSociety

Letters: our seaside towns are worth saving

Skilled jobs, affordable housing and investment in education are all vital components of any rescue package



Scarborough is reinventing itself as Zoomtown-on-Sea. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Scarborough is reinventing itself as Zoomtown-on-Sea. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Sun 1 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Will Hutton is right to deplore the decline of coastal communities (“[There is a way to save our coastal resorts... welcome to Zoomtown-on -Sea](#)”, Comment).

Yes, our buildings are in dire need of renovation, but more crucially we need to retain skilled workers to ensure future prosperity. More equitable school funding might compensate for the years that the lion’s share has been gobbled up by inner cities. Well-resourced schools would attract and retain parents whose skills could increase local wealth and ensure students have the same career and educational prospects as in the suburbs.

The second-home market has been parasitical, creating silent communities for much of the year. Priced out of properties, condemned to extortionate rents, local workers have to make their living elsewhere. Our communities need affordable homes, not more executive homes to swell the profits of construction companies.

Yvonne Williams
Ryde, Isle of Wight

Will Hutton shines an overdue light on the desperate trouble our coastal towns are in. However, I'm not sure championing the exodus from metropolitan areas to the coast is the panacea for this.

The acceleration of this trend, partly fuelled by Covid, has become pronounced in the last six months. One damaging consequence is the rapid rise in rents and prices. The larger salaries and capital of incomers mean the housing crisis has worsened. The gap between average incomes and housing costs is growing rapidly and young people can no longer afford to live in the places they grew up in.

The crisis facing coastal towns requires the building of more affordable housing and a significant expansion in social housing. Addressing the appallingly low level of local wages must also be a priority. Unless this kind of overarching approach is taken, Zoomtown for some will mean Doomtown for others.

Roy Tomlinson
Velator, Braunton, Devon

Resorts can be sad, diminished towns, lacking their past coastal glories, but on a walk down our spacious and pleasant seafront, all I saw were happy families enjoying their staycations and queuing for a turn on our very own Great Yarmouth wheel. So, yes, there are inherent problems but, no, we will not let our truly golden sands disappear from under our feet for lack of striving for sustainable progress.

Judith A Daniels
Cobholm, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk

Brexit is not irreversible

William Keegan continues to expose the insanity of Brexit (“[Labour has to say it out loud: Brexit needs to be reversed](#)”, Business). It is now a slow-burn catastrophe that will probably morph into an even more dysfunctional “no deal” as the EU concludes that Boris Johnson and David Frost are

undermining a treaty that they claim they only signed because of the pressure of parliamentary gridlock.

Keegan is right to demand that Keir Starmer ends Labour's omerta about Brexit. The Brexit process has broken Labour as an effective opposition because they failed to give clear Remainer leadership during the referendum campaign and since. Despite this, there was still a majority in the last election against Brexit and Johnson.

Starmer ought to form an electoral alliance with other progressive parties to campaign for EU re-entry, a modern written constitution, including proportional representation to deny the Tories future electoral dictatorships, and effective wealth taxes to finance a green revolution.

Philip Wood

Kidlington, Oxfordshire

A fair way to provide sick pay

National insurance contributions should be paid by every working person as a small percentage of their income, entitling them access to benefits ("[Levelling up should take many forms...](#)", Comment). With the current system, a person could be employed in two part-time jobs, neither of which allows them to pay any national insurance.

A fairer payment of statutory sick pay is required for each working person as a fair percentage of their wage. Since devolution of the United Kingdom it is more unfair to people living in England as this is the only part of the UK where prescription charges still apply, which for a suddenly sick person could wipe out statutory sick pay. People cannot help becoming ill and it is up to the state to adequately provide for them, but we are run by a selfish government that has no idea what it means to be poorly paid.

Margaret Vandecasteele

Wick, Caithness, Scotland

Bees not welcome

Today, we saw one bee – a bumble – in death throes on the pavement and over the last few weeks we have seen dead bees every day on pavements maintained by Birmingham city council (“[The insect apocalypse: ‘Without them our world will grind to a halt’](#)”, New Review).

We live on Bournville Village Trust land, where greenery and insects are welcome. People may be pleased with well-maintained pavements, without weeds in the cracks or grass in the gutters, but this tends to be accomplished with the use of glyphosate, resulting in the death of any insect unfortunate enough to land on them.

Dr Wiebina Heesterman

Birmingham

Egos in space

John Naughton (“[Jeff Bezos’s vision of life among the stars won’t mend a broken world](#)”, New Review) informs us that Bezos’s motivation for wanting to build a “road to space” is to protect the Earth. Bezos says: “When you go to space and see how fragile it is you want to take care of it even more.”

He doesn’t need to go into space to do this. He could pay his fair share of tax, treat suppliers and workers with respect and pay them accordingly and take a walk in an ancient forest near one of his many homes. This would enable him “to take care of it” more effectively and to become far more aware of Earth’s plight, rather than blasting off into space to bolster his fragile ego.

Christine Williams

Saron, Sir Gaerfyrddin, Wales

Like peas in a pod

I’m enjoying a feast of broad beans from my garden, so I was interested in Georgina Hayden’s recipe for broad bean, dill and tomato salad (“[The 20 best summer vegetable recipes](#)”, Food Monthly).

I was intrigued to read the beans should be podded. My beans are already podded, straight from the plant. I remove them from the pods, a process I have, for nearly 80 years, called “shelling”. I use the same word for removing peas from pods. I suspect most people will understand the expression “as easy as shelling peas”. “As easy as podding peas” doesn’t have the same resonance.

Ken Vines

Horrabridge, Devon

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For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 1 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

A special episode of the soap *Hollyoaks* will be made with an all-black cast, writer and director but not an “all-black cast and crew”, as an article and its headline said. The same article misnamed the Channel 4 executive Kelly Webb-Lamb as “Kelly Lamb”, and mistakenly omitted the actor Tylan Grant’s they/them pronouns ([It’s Hollyoaks, but now with all-black cast and crew...](#), 25 July).

An article misspelled the name of the racehorse trainer John Gosden as “Godsen” in the text and an image caption ([Forgiveness or deselection? Newmarket divided over Matt Hancock’s political future](#), 25 July).

A recipe for [courgette, sweetcorn and chermoula](#) gave ingredient amounts which would generate too much chermoula sauce. So the volume for each ingredient has been reduced by approximately half in the online version of the recipe ([20 best summer vegetable recipes supplement](#), Observer Food Monthly, 25 July).

Other recently amended articles include:

[‘The law is cold. It doesn’t reflect the life lost’: mothers of murdered women tell their stories](#)

[Space-sized egos, tiny tax bills... Billionaires should be jettisoned](#)

[Little Simz: Grey Area review – rap maverick finally finds her groove](#)

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Adapt or die. That is the stark challenge to living in the new world we have made

David Wallace-Wells

We need to decarbonise and fast. But ‘adaptation’, the ways in which we protect people from the crisis, is not a dirty word



People caught in flood water in Zhengzhou city in China's Henan province.
Photograph: AP

People caught in flood water in Zhengzhou city in China's Henan province.
Photograph: AP

Sun 1 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

It won't be enough. It can't be. From here, even an astonishing pace of decarbonisation will still deliver us a warmer world than we have today, full of more eye-opening extremes and more deeply disruptive disasters of the kind, we are learning this summer, that even the wealthiest and most climate-conscious countries are unprepared for. No one is.

That is what Sadiq Khan, London's mayor, meant when he wrote, with the capital inundated, that the city was now on the frontline of the climate emergency and it is the central lesson of the Met Office's annual report on the state of the UK climate, which found that mild British weather was already a relic of a bygone era. The Climate Crisis Advisory Group, led by Sir David King, recently declared that greenhouse gas levels were already so high that they foreclosed a "manageable future for humanity". "[Nowhere is safe,](#)" King said, provoking a host of headlines.

The headlines are right, of course, but in their appeals to the local narcissism of climate panic, they also elide the gaping differences in the capacities of the countries of the world to respond to what is coming. Which is why perhaps the most harrowing of this summer's extreme weather events, even more than the model-breaking [Pacific heat dome](#), was the devastating [flooding in Henan province](#), China, where rapid recent infrastructure expansion has inspired bitter envy across the western world.

At the last count, 99 people died in the flooding, not to mention millions of chickens and other livestock. In Henan, all told, 2.59m acres of crops were damaged. The cost of the disaster, according to still-growing estimates, was more than \$14bn (£10.7bn), of which only a small fraction would be covered by insurance. In Henan's capital, Zhengzhou, subway passengers went to work waist-deep in water, producing photographs and videos that put the images from London into context. All these disasters are less punishing and destructive than they might have been several generations ago, but they show that, for all the progress made, even the world's vanguard infrastructure – the built kind, the natural kind and the human kind – is failing the test of even today's climate, which is the mildest and most benign we will ever see again.

Already, the planet is hotter – at just 1.2C or 1.3C of warming on preindustrial levels – than it has ever been in the long stretch of human civilisation. As a species, everything we have ever known – our histories, our agriculture, our cultures, our politics, our geopolitics – is the result of climate conditions that we have already left behind. It is as if we have landed on a different planet, with a different climate, and are now trying to determine what aspects of the civilisations we've brought with us can survive and what will have to be reshaped or discarded.

The word for this in the climate vernacular is “adaptation” and it has been, for a few decades, a dirty one, seen as an alternative to rapid decarbonisation rather than its necessary, humanitarian partner. The project to protect the people of the world from the impacts of even a more stable climate may prove larger, in the end, than the project of stabilising it, which has so preoccupied us for decades.

Unfortunately, to this point, while mortality from natural disaster has fallen dramatically over the past 100 years, the returns on engineered adaptations to climate impacts, in particular, have been maddeningly spotty. Advocates point to awe-inspiring flood-management systems in the Netherlands, but the \$14bn levees built in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina in 2005 don’t protect against category-five hurricanes today. The challenges will grow, in some cases exponentially, but the blueprint of adaptation is there for all to see, a photo-negative of all of the impacts that scientists have told us to expect even within the next few decades: heat stress and sea-level rise, wildfires and river flooding, agricultural decline, economic stagnation, migration crises, conflict and state collapse.

In a certain way, a response to sea-level rise is the easiest to envisage. Its most dramatic impacts arrive slowly, over centuries, giving generations time to adjust. However, the adjustment will have to be very large indeed. Perhaps half the world’s coastline will have to be eventually abandoned, the other half protected by defensive infrastructure of a scale straight out of *Cyberpunk*, although “natural” responses such as restored wetlands and mangrove forests can also play a role. Such places as Bangladesh or Myanmar, barring meaningful climate reparations, will probably focus on flood-alarm systems, concrete bunkers and a goal of “managed retreat”.

Declines in deaths during heatwaves in parts of Europe have shown that there are some possible responses to that problem. They include more widespread air-conditioning and public cooling centres; better public communication and water-drinking campaigns; and reworking the elements of urban infrastructure, such as asphalt and black roofs, which amplify dangerous temperatures.

Farmlands can’t be moved all that much, but crops can be genetically edited to thrive in the new world

Whether these measures will work as well in much poorer parts of the world, once extreme heat is daily rather than seasonal, remains to be seen. Farmlands can't be moved all that much, but crops can be genetically edited to thrive in the new world, with aversions to GM foods becoming either a residue of an earlier era of relative abundance or a luxury of the affluent or both.

In theory, the fossil-fuel business could be functionally replaced by negative-emissions plantations, both industrial and "natural", undoing the whole work of industrialisation by recapturing carbon from the sky. But this is not work that can be done out of sight or out of mind. Planting forests at a scale large enough to meaningfully alter the planet's carbon trajectory, for instance, could raise food prices by 80%. Reforestation might require, according to one recent review, a land area between five and 15 times the size of Texas. Even in the most optimistic scenario, billions of tons of carbon would have to be removed from the air every year and stored somewhere – and less optimistic scenarios will require even more.

The world's vanguard infrastructure is failing in today's climate, which is the most benign we will ever see again

These measures aren't trivial and they aren't a way to avoid hard choices. They are a last-resort attempt to square the punishing climate we are making with one that we may feel comfortable living in. This is the face of the new world. Or it will be, if we're lucky, committing ourselves as much to world-building as world-saving.

David Wallace-Wells is the author of The Uninhabitable Earth and is editor at large at New York Magazine

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Tokyo 2020 Olympics: mixed triathlon relay, athletics blasts off and more – as it happened

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Tokyo 2020 Olympics: full medal table

Find out who's topping the leaderboard at the Olympic Games, and drill down to discover which events each country won medals for

Thu 29 Jul 2021 08.52 EDT

[Medal table](#)

About the medal table

As is traditional, the table prioritises the number of gold medals won. On this basis in 2016, the United States led the field with 46 golds, with Great Britain second on 27 and China third with 26. If countries have the same

number of gold medals, the order is then dictated by which has the most silvers, and finally bronze if the numbers are still identical.

The US won 121 medals overall in Rio, while China had more medals overall than Britain, 70 to 67. UK Sport has said it hopes Team GB will win “between 45 and 70” medals in Tokyo.

Japan, the host country at the 2020 Games, came sixth in the medal table in 2016 with 12 gold medals. Before the pandemic it was targeting 30 golds at these Games, but its Olympic committee says it no longer has a target.

Australia came 10th at Rio, with eight gold medals, equal on golds with Italy, Hungary and the Netherlands.

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Team GB rowing inquest begins after worst Olympic return for 49 years

- Bugajski says former coach ‘destroyed the souls’ of some rowers
- ‘Significant changes’ promised in buildup to Paris Olympics



Members of Great Britain's men's eight on the podium with bronze at Sea Forest Waterway in Tokyo. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

Members of Great Britain's men's eight on the podium with bronze at Sea Forest Waterway in Tokyo. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

[John Ashdown](#)

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Fri 30 Jul 2021 00.01 EDT

The inquest into British Rowing's dismal Tokyo display began in earnest after a solitary bronze on the final day of competition at the Sea Forest Waterway meant Britain's rowers registered their worst Olympic performance for 49 years.

The debate is likely to reach into the heart of the culture at the organisation and focus on the decision to allow Jürgen Gröbler, who had coached eight gold-medal crews for Great Britain over seven Olympics, to leave a year before these Games. The German's legacy, though, is not wholly positive, with Josh Bugajski, a member of the men's eight who won bronze on Friday, saying in the aftermath of the final that the German coach "destroyed the souls" of those he took against.

[GB rowers swerve off course as era of Olympic dominance starts to sink |](#)
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“I’m going to be brave and say something that the crew don’t want me to say. I cracked open a bottle of champagne when Jürgen retired,” Bugajski told [the Telegraph](#) and [the Times](#).

“I had a very dark three years under him. And I think I would be a coward if I didn’t say that on behalf of the guys who are stuck at home, because they got a darker side of Jürgen and aren’t in the team.

“There were some people he just took a disliking to. What he did to them was destroy them – destroy their soul, destroy everything they had. He had complete power.”

Bugajski’s crewmate Mo Sbihi, on the other hand, described Gröbler as a winner who “knew how to elevate people” and there is little doubt that the German, who started his career with British Rowing by coaching Sir Steve Redgrave and Sir Matthew Pinsent to golds in 1992 and 1996, helped the organisation get the most out of its funding from UK Sport.

The £24.6m it received over the Tokyo Olympic cycle was more than any other sport yet Britain’s rowers failed to pick up a gold medal for the first time since the 1980 Games in Moscow and their contribution to the medals table is poorer than any since the 1972 Games.

British Rowing’s performance director, Brendan Purcell, told the BBC the event had proved “heartbreaking for the athletes” but added that “significant changes” would be made in order to return to winning ways at the Paris Games in 2024.

UK Sport’s chief executive, Sally Munday, said that, like all sports, the performance would be reviewed but saw plenty of positives. “I totally understand why people would ask the question about the two medals, but I think we need to put this into perspective of the bigger picture for rowing,” she told the PA news agency.

“They made eight finals, which is more than any other nation, and had six fourth-place finishes, and they have got probably the youngest and least experienced squad that they have had in the last 20 years. And I think you need to put all of that in context.

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“I think there’s huge promise for rowing in Paris in three years’ time. I’m confident British Rowing will have a look at how they are going to convert those fourth-place finishes into podium places, and I think they have got the knowledge and expertise to do that.”

Dame Katherine Grainger, who won medals at the last five [Olympic Games](#), was also keen to emphasise the positive. “If you look at the medal haul, it’s very small compared to especially the last two, three, four Olympic Games, and it is disappointing on some level,” she told the BBC. “But, at the same time, we knew after Rio there was the biggest change we have ever seen from not just athletes – I think we only had eight athletes coming to this Games who’d ever been to a Games before. We’ve never had anything like that.”



Jürgen Gröbler masterminded British successes over the course of seven Olympics. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

The double Olympic champion James Cracknell, meanwhile, was less conciliatory. “We got three gold, two silver in Rio. We come away from Tokyo, £27m of investment in British Rowing, with one silver and one bronze,” he said. “At a time when the national budget is under pressure from so many different areas, is that a good return on investment?”

The men’s eight of Bugajski, Jacob Dawson, Tom George, Sbihi, Charles Elwes, Oliver Wynne-Griffith, James Rudkin and Tom Ford were at least able to double the medals tally on the final day, taking third behind New Zealand and Germany and adding to the silver won by the men’s quadruple sculls on Wednesday.

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Duncan Scott takes 200m medley silver – and can add to third Tokyo medal

- Scott second again as China's Wang Shun takes Olympic gold
- Luke Greenbank wins bronze in 200m backstroke



Duncan Scott has won a relay gold and two individual silver medals at the 2020 Olympics. Photograph: Ian MacNicol/Getty Images

Duncan Scott has won a relay gold and two individual silver medals at the 2020 Olympics. Photograph: Ian MacNicol/Getty Images

[Andy Bull at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre](#)

Thu 29 Jul 2021 23.17 EDT

Three events, three finals, three medals. On Friday morning Duncan Scott won a silver in the men's 200m individual medley, to go with the silver [in the 200m freestyle](#) and the gold in the [4x200m freestyle relay](#) he won earlier this week. Add in the two silvers he won in the relays in 2016, and he is now the most successful British Olympic swimmer since the Edwardian era. One more and he will be the first British athlete in any sport to win four medals at one Olympics. Given that he still has two events left, the men's medley relay and the mixed medley relay, there's every chance he will do it, too.

[Emma McKeon grabs gold as Australia enjoy more Olympic swimming success](#)

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Not that Scott's worried about any of that right now. He is so busy he hardly has time to stop and talk, let alone think about all the records he has a chance of breaking. When you do get a word with him, you can tell he is having the time of his life. His only regret was that he was not able to win an individual gold medal. He was beaten by his teammate Tom Dean in the 200m freestyle and by China's Wang Shun in the medley, but he got over both disappointments pretty quickly. "Initially I was really gutted," the 24-year-old said, before he broke into a grin. "But I've had enough time to think about it a bit more and let it sink in."



Duncan Scott during the breaststroke leg of the men's 200m individual medley final. Photograph: Harry How/Getty Images

When Scott does get a chance to look back at it all, he will see that this individual medley final was one of the great races. For four successive Games, it belonged to Michael Phelps. He won it in 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2016, which means there are some swimmers competing here in Tokyo this week who were not even born the last time anyone else had a look-in, and others who have spent their entire careers waiting for this, a first chance to swim in an Olympic final without having to race someone who cannot be beaten. There were some of the greatest medley swimmers of all time in this race, four of the eight fastest men in history, all waiting for this opportunity.

Scott was not one of them. Glasgow-born, he did medley swimming as a junior but swam it at a major championships for the first time in 2018. Apparently his regular event programme of the 100m freestyle, 200m freestyle, 4x100m medley relay, 4x100m freestyle relay, and 4x200m freestyle relay was not busy enough, so he decided to fill the gaps in his schedule by taking on the most technically demanding event in swimming, one that requires mastery of all four strokes and the turns and transitions between them.

On the starting blocks, Scott had Kosuke Hagino, the former world swimmer of the year, Michael Andrew, the US champion, and Laszlo Cseh, who won his first of his six Olympic medals in 2004, on one side, and Wang, who finished third behind Phelps in 2016, and Daiya Seto, the world champion, on the other. Every single one of them had a better personal best in this event than Scott. Or they did, anyway. “There’s not many who are quicker now,” Scott said. His time of 1min 55.28sec was the seventh-fastest in history. The man is a natural-born racer. Switzerland’s Jérémie Desplanches took the bronze.

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Scott was even happier for his friend Luke Greenbank, who won bronze in the 200m backstroke. They have been on swimming teams together since 2014 and he knows how much Greenbank has been through. Now 23, he won bronze in this event at the Youth Olympics in 2014 but struggled to make the transition into senior swimming and went through a miserable few years. The bronze here was a reward for sticking with the sport. The two of them will likely both be on Great Britain’s team for the men’s 4x100m medley on Sunday. For Scott, it will be his 10th race of the week. It is a lunatic schedule.



Luke Greenbank reacts to coming third in the men's 200m backstroke final.
Photograph: Clive Rose/Getty Images

"I think some people would find that quite challenging, yeah," Scott said, "and it is something I've had to get better and better at, probably since the last Olympics really, trying to park one swim and move on to the next. You have to manage yourself physically but I think it's toughest mentally, really, because it's really draining."

The secret, he said through another big smile, is to "get out of the building really sharp, try not to do too many questions with the media, because it's really important that you try to minimise your time in the arena and the environment." And with that, he was gone, off to the training pool to begin his warm-down. You could count the hours till he would be back again.

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Ministers under fire for putting France on England's 'amber plus' list

Criticism grows after concerns raised over whether there was too much focus on Covid cases in Réunion

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Passengers at St Pancras International station in London on Thursday. France was added to the 'amber plus' list two weeks ago. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Passengers at St Pancras International station in London on Thursday. France was added to the ‘amber plus’ list two weeks ago. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Natalie Grover](#)

Thu 29 Jul 2021 15.11 EDT

Ministers are facing growing criticism for putting [France](#) on the new “amber plus” travel list, after concerns were raised about whether they focused too much on variant cases in its Réunion Island territory 5,700 miles (9,180 km) from Paris.

The UK foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, [admitted on Thursday](#) the decision to impose tougher restrictions on millions of fully vaccinated French citizens and Britons holidaying or living across the Channel was partly due to the prevalence of the Beta variant on Réunion.

He defended the move, saying it was “not the distance that matters” but rather “the ease of travel between different component parts of any individual country”.

France was put on England’s amber plus list two weeks ago, after the government took advice from the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC).

At the time, the reason given by the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care was the “persistent presence of cases in France of the Beta variant”, but a diplomatic row with France began gathering pace.

In a stern rebuke of the JBC, Mary Gregory, a deputy director at the Office for Statistics Regulation, wrote to the organisation, criticising it for “not making the data and sources clear” for its advice on France.

She said there was confusion about “whether cases from overseas territories had been excluded for France” and that refusals to publish clear evidence underpinning the decision “fall short of our expectations on transparency”.

Gregory said the JBC had confirmed one of the ways it tracked variants was the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (Gisaid), which showed there had been 1,023 Beta cases in Réunion – equal to about a third of the total number discovered across mainland France, 2,974.

Réunion is still on England's normal amber list even though the ratio of Beta cases to people is much higher, granting anyone travelling from the island who is fully vaccinated exemption from isolation on arrival, so long as they get two negative tests.

The Gisaid figures revealed the number of Beta cases across France had grown by just 1.9% in the past four weeks – significantly less than Spain, where they have risen 14.2% across the same period.

Covid cases in France – graph

Prof Sir David Spiegelhalter, a non-executive director for the UK Statistics Authority, said it was clear Raab had acknowledged the decision on France was mainly based on data from Réunion and that this should have been made clear at the time.

Spiegelhalter said the reasoning for putting France on the amber plus list “was unclear, to say the least”, adding that “the data behind such important policy decisions should be transparently available”.

Data gleaned from random samples of positive tests showed Beta prevalence fell from about 7% in late April to 2.8% by the end of June in mainland France, according to [that published by French authorities](#) on 19 July. Only days earlier did UK ministers decide that travellers returning to England from [France](#) would be forced to [quarantine even if fully vaccinated](#).

Sylvia Richardson, the director of the MRC biostatistics unit at the University of Cambridge and president of the Royal Statistical Society, said she started looking into the data when the UK decision on quarantine policy was announced. “I had some suspicion that there was some confusion,” she said, adding that the UK government should have conferred with the French authorities before making its decision.

Before 19 July, French authorities were publishing information on variant prevalence for mainland France and its territories as one number – but the geographical differences compelled them to publish the numbers on mainland France separately.

Jim McMahon, the shadow transport secretary, said the traffic-light system was so “baffling” that ministers were “confusing themselves”.

“We cannot continue to rely on the government’s interpretation of the figures, particularly when they are seemingly only capable of updating the public and the travel industry either via the press or social media,” he said.

Layla Moran, a Liberal Democrat MP and chair of the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, said there was incoherent messaging about the reasons for the decision and urged ministers to lay out “clear justifications for any changes made with regards to international travel”.

She added: “This slapdash approach will only continue to undermine public confidence in government decisions, at a time when clarity and caution are crucial.”

France on Wednesday hit out at England’s decision to make it the only EU country excluded from new rules allowing fully vaccinated travellers jabbed on the continent or in the US to avoid quarantine, if coming from an amber list country.

The Europe minister, Clément Beaune, said it was “excessive”, telling France’s LCI TV: “It’s frankly incomprehensible on health grounds. It’s not based on science and discriminatory towards the French. I hope it will be reviewed as soon as possible; it’s just common sense.”

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Israel to offer Pfizer Covid booster shots to people over 60

Announcement makes Israel the first country to offer a third dose of a western vaccine to its citizens on a wide scale

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Israel's prime minister, Naftali Bennett, announced the country will offer a coronavirus booster to people over 60 who have already been vaccinated
Photograph: Oded Balilty/AP

Israel's prime minister, Naftali Bennett, announced the country will offer a coronavirus booster to people over 60 who have already been vaccinated

Photograph: Oded Balilty/AP

Associated Press

Thu 29 Jul 2021 20.01 EDT

Israel's prime minister has announced that the country would offer a coronavirus booster shot to those people over 60 who have already been vaccinated.

The announcement by Naftali Bennett makes Israel, which launched one of the world's most successful vaccination drives earlier this year, the first country to offer a third dose of a western vaccine to its citizens on a wide scale.

"I'm announcing this evening the beginning of the campaign to receive the booster vaccine, the third vaccine," Bennett said in a nationally televised address. "Reality proves the vaccines are safe. Reality also proves the vaccines protect against severe morbidity and death. And like the flu vaccine that needs to be renewed from time to time, it is the same in this case."

[Israel restores indoor mask requirement after rise in Covid cases](#)

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The decision comes at a time of rising infections and signs that the vaccine's efficacy dwindles over time.

Anyone over 60 who was vaccinated more than five months ago will be eligible. Bennett said the country's new president, Isaac Herzog, would be the first to get the booster on Friday. It will also be offered to the general public.

Bennett, who is 49, said his first call after the news conference would be to his mother to encourage her to get her booster shot.

Neither the US nor the EU have approved coronavirus booster shots. It's not yet proven if a third dose helps and, if so, who needs one and when.

But Bennett said that a team of expert advisers had agreed overwhelmingly, by a 56-1 margin, that it made sense to launch the booster campaign. He said the recommendation was made after “considerable research and analysis” and that its information would be shared around the world. Preliminary studies in Israel have indicated the vaccine’s protection against serious illness dropped among those vaccinated in January.

“The findings show that there is a decline in the body’s immunity over time, and the purpose of the booster is to re-strengthen it, thus significantly reducing the chances of infection and serious illness,” Bennett said.

Israel has used the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine on its population. Previously, boosters were used in some countries with the Chinese and Russian vaccines.

cases

Early this year, Israel carried out [one of the world's most aggressive and successful vaccination campaigns](#), reaching a deal with Pfizer to purchase enough vaccines for its population in exchange for sharing its data with the drug maker.

Over 57% of the country’s 9.3 million citizens have received two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, and over 80% of the population over 40 is vaccinated.

The vaccination program allowed Israel to reopen its economy ahead of other countries. But Israel has seen a spike in cases of the new delta variant, even among people who are vaccinated. Bennett urged unvaccinated Israelis, especially younger people who have been hesitant, to get vaccinated immediately.

Earlier this month, Israel started giving individuals with weakened immune systems a third shot to increase their resilience against Covid-19.

Pfizer said Wednesday that the effectiveness of the vaccine drops slightly six months after the second dose. Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech have said they plan to seek authorisation for boosters in August.

Why is Israel lifting Covid restrictions as England extends them?

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Most studies – and real-world data from Britain and the US – so far show that the Pfizer vaccine remains powerfully protective against serious illness. Just Wednesday, Pfizer released data from its long-running 44,000-person study showing that while protection against any symptomatic infection declined slightly six months after immunization, protection against severe Covid-19 remained at nearly 97%. Earlier this month, Israel's Health Ministry announced that protection against severe disease was around 93%.

The World Health Organization said earlier this month that there is not enough evidence to show that a third dose is needed.

The agency's officials have appealed for wealthier countries to share vaccines with poorer nations that have yet to immunise their people, instead of using them as boosters. Israel itself has come under criticism for not sharing more of its vaccines with the Palestinians.

The Israeli Health Ministry recorded at least 2,165 new coronavirus cases on Thursday, following an accelerating rise in infections over the past month. Serious cases of Covid-19 have grown from 19 a day in mid-June to 159 as the highly infectious delta variant has spread.

Thanks to its successful vaccination campaign, Israel lifted almost all of its coronavirus restrictions this spring. But with new cases back on the rise, the country has tried to halt the spread of the highly infectious delta variant by re-imposing limitations on gatherings, restoring a “green pass” system for vaccinated people to enter certain enclosed spaces, and an indoor mask mandate.

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Pregnant women urged to get Covid jab amid rise in hospital admissions

New data finds unvaccinated expectant mothers more at risk, with Delta variant linked to more severe symptoms

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Of the 171 pregnant women hospitalised with Covid symptoms since May, 98% had not received a vaccine. Photograph: David Jones/PA

Of the 171 pregnant women hospitalised with Covid symptoms since May, 98% had not received a vaccine. Photograph: David Jones/PA

Linda Geddes Science correspondent

Thu 29 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

England's top midwife is urging expectant mums to get the Covid-19 vaccine as soon as possible, as new data suggests a worrying rise in Covid-19 hospital admissions among unvaccinated pregnant women in the UK.

There is also evidence that the Delta variant poses a significantly greater risk to pregnant women than previous strains.

The data suggests that the overwhelming majority (98%) of 171 pregnant women hospitalised with coronavirus symptoms since mid-May had not received a Covid-19 vaccine, compared to just three women who had received a first dose, and no fully vaccinated pregnant women.

Prof Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, chief midwifery officer for England, said: “Vaccines save lives, and this is another stark reminder that the Covid-19 jab can keep you, your baby and your loved ones safe and out of hospital.”

Although pregnant women are no more likely to catch Covid-19, they are already recognised to be at slightly increased risk of becoming severely unwell, or to experience complications such as preterm birth or stillbirth if they become infected.

[‘Mixed advice’ driving Covid vaccine hesitancy in pregnant UK women](#)
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The new study draws on data collected by the UK Obstetric Surveillance System (UKOSS), which gathers information on severe pregnancy complications from all 194 UK hospitals with a consultant-led maternity unit.

It found that since 1 March 2020, 3,371 pregnant women have been admitted to hospital with Covid-19 symptoms – either as a precaution or because they have needed additional health support – and that the severity of their illness appears to have worsened with each successive wave of the pandemic.

About a quarter (24%) of those admitted during the first wave had moderate or severe disease, compared with 36% of those infected with the Alpha variant during the second wave. The latter group were also more likely to require respiratory support, have pneumonia, and be admitted to intensive care. Meanwhile, 45% of pregnant women admitted with the Delta variant have experienced moderate or severe disease, with an even greater proportion suffering from pneumonia.

In the last three months alone, one in three pregnant women in hospital with Covid-19 in England required additional respiratory support, with 37% developing pneumonia, and around one in seven requiring intensive care (15%).

Prof Marian Knight at the University of Oxford, who led the study, said: “It could be that [pregnant women] are simply getting a higher dose of virus, or due to the variant behaving differently. It could also be a reflection of clinician behaviour in that pregnant women are getting treated with more intensive care earlier than they were before, which is a good thing.”

The Delta variant has also been associated with more severe symptoms and an [increased risk of hospitalisation](#) among the general population.

The study, which has not yet been peer reviewed, also found that one in five women admitted to hospital with serious Covid symptoms went on to give birth prematurely, while the likelihood of delivery by caesarean section doubled.

Of the 742 pregnant women admitted to hospital with Covid-19 symptoms since 1 February, 99% had not been vaccinated.

[Covid jabs offered to pregnant women: your questions answered](#)
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In light of this data, Dunkley-Bent has written to midwives and GP practices across the country urging them to encourage uptake of the Covid-19 jab among pregnant women. She said: “We need everyone to come forward and take up the evergreen offer of a jab which is why I am calling on pregnant

women to take action to protect themselves and their babies and on my fellow midwives to ensure they have the information they need to do so.”

In April, the [Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation](#) (JCVI) advised that pregnant women should be offered the Pfizer and Moderna Covid-19 vaccines

A new survey of 6,267 pregnant women by campaigning group [Pregnant Then Screwed](#) found that 37% of pregnant women feel scared to leave the house now that Covid-19 restrictions have lifted, and 70% are limiting their interactions with others as much as possible. Nine out of 10 reported feeling scared for their safety.

The group said it had been inundated with stories of [negative messaging](#) given to pregnant women from healthcare professionals.

However, both the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) and the Royal College of Midwives have recommended vaccination as one of the best defences for pregnant women against severe Covid-19.

Dr Edward Morris, president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: “Every day our members are seeing very sick pregnant women with Covid-19 in hospital and the majority are unvaccinated. We want to reassure pregnant women that Covid-19 vaccines are the safest and best way to protect you and your baby from severe illness and premature birth.”

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Rights and freedomIndigenous peoples

‘Best a human can be’: indigenous Amazonian Karapiru dies of Covid

Karapiru Awá Guajá, among the last of the hunter-gatherer Awá tribe, survived a massacre and a decade alone in the forest, inspiring others with his resilience and ‘extraordinary warmth’



Karapiru campaigned for the eviction of illegal loggers and ranchers from Awá territories. Photograph: Sarah Shenker/Survival International

Karapiru campaigned for the eviction of illegal loggers and ranchers from Awá territories. Photograph: Sarah Shenker/Survival International

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Saeed Kamali Dehghan

Fri 30 Jul 2021 02.30 EDT

He survived a massacre that killed most of his family in the Brazilian Amazon and lived for 10 years alone in the forest, but Karapiru Awá Guajá could not escape the pandemic.

Karapiru, one of the last of the hunter-gatherer nomadic Awá of Maranhão state, died of Covid-19 earlier this month. With only 300 Awá thought to remain, they have been called the “[earth’s most threatened tribe](#)”.

In the 1970s, Karapiru lost almost everyone he knew in a genocidal attack on his tribe by settlers. His wife, daughter, siblings and other family members were killed, and he was shot in the back. But his resilience became a source of inspiration for activists working to protect indigenous and uncontacted peoples.

Pictures capture his broad smile, but not the scale of troubles he had in life.

Survival International, a group working for the rights of indigenous people, [describes Karapiru’s “extraordinary warmth and kindness”](#).



Awá villagers on a road built illegally by loggers through indigenous land in Maranhão state. Photograph: AP

Awá lands have been under attack since the discovery of iron ore in the late 1960s. The 2km long trains on a 900km railway [built through the forest in the 1980s](#) pass just metres from Awá territory on their way to one of the world’s largest iron ore mines. The scale of the mining development gouged from the Amazon is such that it can be [seen from space](#).

Skilled archers, the Awá live scattered in family groups over a large area, and travel at night using torches made from tree resin. Many have had no contact with the outside world.

Karapiru was estimated to be 75 when he died. The Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI), a Catholic NGO working with indigenous peoples, [reported his death](#) as “a victim of Covid-19”, despite him having had the Covid vaccine.

He died in a hospital in Santa Inês in Maranhão and was buried in the municipality of Zé Doca, against the wishes of his friends, who wanted to bury him on Awá land.

I spent a long time in the forest. I was always running away, on my own. I had no family to help me, to talk to

Karapiru Awá Guajá

Marina Magalhães, a linguist studying the Awá language, became friends with Karapiru after they met in 2001.

Magalhães says Karapiru’s relatives told her he had gone to another village in the months before his death to visit his son, Tamata. When he returned to Tiracambu, the village was protesting against a government bill that limited the demarcation of new indigenous land. Villagers believed it was safe to meet during the protests, including with people from other ethnicities, because they had been vaccinated. In Tiracambu alone, at least 12 Awás tested positive for Covid after the protests.

“He was one of the kindest people I’ve ever met. He liked to hug people, which is not a common Awá attitude towards non-indigenous people, and he often watched my work with other Awá from a distance, always smiling when I looked at him,” says Magalhães.

“Karapiru, in my view, represents the best that a human being can become, due to his friendliness and tranquility. Also, an example of how resilient we can be in the most extreme situations.”



The Awá rely on the forest. Their survival has been threatened by logging, mining and a 900km railway running close to their land. Photograph: Bonnie Jo Mount/The Washington Post/Getty

Fiona Watson, research director at Survival International, first met Karapiru in 1992.

“I just thought I cannot believe this man survived on his own for 10 years, not speaking to anybody,” she says. “He spoke so quietly, he whispered, that really struck me because I thought, of course, he’s had to become invisible in order to survive.

I hope the same things that happened to me won’t happen to my daughter. I hope it won’t be like in my time

Karapiru Awá Guajá

“He started talking and smiling, and I thought how is he not more traumatised? He knew I wasn’t [an enemy], he had no rancour, no bitterness. That astounded me. That magnanimity. What an extraordinary human being, to be able to sort of forgive people in a way and to be able to carry on your life.”

Karapiru's life was the subject of an award-winning documentary in 2006, by the Italian-born director Andrea Tonacci, called *Serras da Desordem*.

Madalena Borges from CIMI also knew him well. "Karapiru was full of peace, without malice, smiling, very friendly, receptive to everyone, soft-spoken. A great sage of ancestral knowledge about Awá. Very skilled in the art of hunting and fishing, he went out daily in search of food for his family," she says.



Karapiru spent 10 years alone in the forest after a massacre that killed most of his family. Eventually he was reunited with his son and returned to an Awá community. Photograph: Fiona Watson/Survival International

Since the iron ore infrastructure opened up forests to loggers and farmers, the Awá people have seen their forests shrink as land is cleared for cattle. The noise of chainsaws and trucks has emptied the forest of monkeys, peccaries and tapirs.

"To the settlers, the Awá were an obstacle, a primitive nuisance, and they killed the Awá in large numbers," according to Survival International. On one occasion poisoned flour was left for Awá to eat.

After the massacre, Karapiru spent 10 years alone, eating honey, small birds and sleeping in the boughs of copaiba trees and among the orchids.

“I hid in the forest and escaped from the white people. They killed my mother, my brothers and sisters and my wife,” [he told Survival International](#).



Forest fires in 2015 in Arariboia, Maranhão state. Arariboia is home to about 80 Awá and 12,000 Guajajaras, another indigenous people. Photograph: Marizilda Cruppe/AFP/Getty

“When I was shot during the massacre, I suffered a great deal because I couldn’t put any medicine on my back. I couldn’t see the wound: it was amazing that I escaped – it was through the *Tupã* [spirit]. I spent a long time in the forest, hungry and being chased by ranchers. I was always running away, on my own. I had no family to help me, to talk to. So I went deeper and deeper into the forest.”

He walked 400 miles to Bahia state where he was given shelter by a farmer despite not being able to communicate with him.



Karapiru with his wife Marimia and their baby in 2000. Photograph: Fiona Watson/Survival International

Living on the farm he tried manioc, rice, flour and coffee for the first time. “It was tasty. I had more and more – it is good,” he later said.

Authorities and anthropologists tried various ways to speak with him but to no avail. However when a young Awá man called Xiramuku was brought in to see if he could communicate with him, it turned out he was Karapiru’s son, who had also survived the massacre.

The pair moved to Tiracambu, a mountain village in Maranhão, home to an Awá community.

Karapiru remarried and began fighting for the rights of his people, opposing the anti-indigenous policies of Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, [appearing at demonstrations](#) with his bow and arrows, vulture and toucan feathers.

[Yanomami beset by violent land-grabs, hunger and disease in Brazil](#)
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In an interview, Karapiru said: “There are times when I don’t like to remember all that happened to me. I hope the same things that happened to

me won't happen to my daughter. I hope she will eat lots of game, lots of fish, and grow up to be healthy. I hope it won't be like in my time."

Watson took a picture of him and his new wife, Marimia, with their baby daughter in 2000.

"I thought he has hope, he had this incredible positivity, he had a lot of charisma. I thought it was wonderful that he was planning his future, marrying again, and not just surviving but wanting to live well," she says.

In 2014, the Brazilian government sent helicopters and squads of police to remove illegal settlers. But farmers and loggers are back, emboldened by Bolsonaro's policies.

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[A new start after 60Life and style](#)

A new start after 60: ‘I had retreated into myself – then I became a life model at 64’



‘You are stripped bare in person as well as in body’ ... Terry Aston, who became a life model later in life. Photograph: David Turner

‘You are stripped bare in person as well as in body’ ... Terry Aston, who became a life model later in life. Photograph: David Turner

After divorce and the death of his son, Terry Aston began drawing, before deciding to pose for an art class himself. It provided a new insight into how other people see him

*[Paula Cocozza](#)
[@CocozzaPaula](#)*

Fri 30 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

“I’ve always been at ease with my body,” says Terry Aston. There’s no need to psych himself up before he lets slip his robe and submits his naked self to the scrutiny of an art class. He does take paracetamol first, though – at 71, holding a pose for two hours hurts. He begins with a rear view, then works his way round.

Life modelling is an unusual pursuit to adopt after retirement, so why do it? “I wanted to see myself as other people see me,” Aston says.

He has confronted his own head and body in the round, at a sculpture class, and seen his naked torso “stretched” out of proportion and charcoaled on to crumpled paper. No doubt these are novel perspectives, but surely Aston took up modelling hoping for something in himself to emerge from all these variations? “You are … well … literally stripped bare in person as well as in body,” he says.

After he and his wife divorced in 2013, Aston started to draw. “I take full responsibility [for the divorce]” he says. “Nihilistic behaviour … I was in a pretty dark place.” His son Tom had died by suicide a few years earlier. While Aston was in digs, waiting for the divorce to go through, he had “a period of, you know, self-narrative and contemplation”. He picked up a pencil and “began to explore” his feelings more deeply.



A painting of Terry Aston. Photograph: Provided by Terry Aston

But there was a problem. “Being the person I am, I wanted to go from zero to Caravaggio in 10 minutes,” he says. He would get home “pissed off”. One day, Aston got chatting to the life model after class, and applied to the Register of Artists’ Models. As a former managing director of a medical equipment company, Aston knew how to build a website, and sold his services as a model to classes all around Oxfordshire, where he lives. On his busiest days, he has three bookings. “It’s not for the faint-hearted. You really are examined in detail.”

Naked modelling is exposing work, so it is surprising to hear Aston say that his childhood experiences led him to “build up a mental carapace … Made myself totally impregnable.” He grew up in a council house in Bermondsey, south-east London, and after his parents separated, he lived with his mother. When he was 16, she had a heart attack: he found her dead on the floor.

“That carapace served me well,” he says. “With the divorce and my son, and all the other things that happened to me, I was able to retreat into myself.” He pauses. “Actually, it wasn’t such a good thing.”



‘It’s not for the faint-hearted’ ... a sketch of Aston. Photograph: Provided by Terry Aston

Aston has always been comfortable in his physical skin – he used to enjoy naturist holidays – but his emotional skin was a different matter. Somehow, by subjecting his body to scrutiny, he has freed himself to open his feelings to scrutiny too. He recently shared the death of his son with his sculpture class.

“I said to them: ‘You are not just sculpting a figure, you are sculpting a person. You have sculpted me before, when you have seen one side of my personality, which is a tough, rough, slightly pugilistic person. Here’s the other side of me.’” His voice cracked as he spoke; the sculptors’ eyes were wet.

“At its worst, modelling is a bit of vanity,” Aston says. At its best, it is a form of self-recovery; especially since he views his behaviour before his divorce as “a form of self-harm”. And maybe the clues to this lie in his experience on the other side of the easel.

When Aston was drawing, he hated still life because there was always “this business of wanting to get it right. But with a figure, you’ve got some degree of licence in how you interpret the shape,” he says. “The lines don’t have to

be exact.” Drawing people – and presumably being drawn by them – is liberating. “It’s forgiving, in some respects.”

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Movies

‘Mary Whitehouse is living in my head’: how the video nasty scandal inspired a hot new film



‘I try to keep it fresh’ ... Niamh Algar in Prano Bailey-Bond’s *Censor*.
Photograph: Maria Lax/Silver Salt Films/Timpson Films/Alamy

‘I try to keep it fresh’ ... Niamh Algar in Prano Bailey-Bond’s *Censor*.
Photograph: Maria Lax/Silver Salt Films/Timpson Films/Alamy

Censor, Prano Bailey-Bond’s horror debut, was inspired by the 80s home video outrage. She discusses art versus offence, while the BBFC’s head makes the case for its relevance today

[Danny Leigh](#)

Fri 30 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Rising film directors hailed as rock stars by the movie industry don't always have much to talk about. Prano Bailey-Bond is different. Her first feature, [the smart, playful horror Censor](#), is a talking point itself, an excavation of a murky British past. Then there is her background, of eye-opening things seen notably young. Her interview style is sharp. "I try to keep it fresh without changing the whole story," she says.

Bailey-Bond has dark hair in a fringe, a trace of a Welsh accent and the friendly, practical manner of a film-maker used to working on a budget. Censor is set in an unwell-looking London, circa 1985. The heroine – ish – is Enid, played by Niamh Algar, a film examiner at what we take to be [the British Board of Film Classification](#). Her personal history is a risk for an organisation in crisis. That much is drawn from real life – [the tinderbox era of video nasties](#).

The video nasty scandal arose from the emergence of what was then called home video. As with many disruptive technologies, legal loopholes meant that watching films at home was suddenly – in the eyes of some – a lawless, dangerous territory. Dingy living rooms lay outside the remit of the BBFC – home videos did not need a certificate.

Throughout the early 80s, headlines shrieked the diehard outrage of the anti-“permissive society” campaigner Mary Whitehouse. Finally, the director of public prosecutions released a list of 72 titles whose distribution might invite legal action for contravening the Obscene Publications Act 1959. These included Sam Raimi's [The Evil Dead](#) (later a franchise, a musical and a series on the Starz network) and work by the genre grandee [Dario Argento](#) and the Andy Warhol associate Paul Morrissey. The bulk were dog-eared cannibal and zombie flicks, some inventive, others flatly grim. All were effectively banned.



Moral crusader ... Mary Whitehouse in 1985. Photograph: E Hamilton West/The Guardian

Bailey-Bond has seen most of them. "A lot are on YouTube," she says. Others exist now as lavish Blu-rays. She revisited many as research for Censor. "I really love a few of them. It was fun taking notes." Eventually, the law caught up with home video, equipping the BBFC to rate home entertainment, demanding cuts as it saw fit. Bailey-Bond also accessed the examiners' reports. "There were no guidelines. So you see their personality in what caught their eye. Their own obsessions."

The modern BBFC offered up more than old manila files. Censor is set in a likeness of the board's headquarters in Soho Square, London. Bailey-Bond spent time with working examiners. Whitehouse died in 2001, but the board and its colourful ratings remain a fact of British life. When I ask for an interview, its chief executive, David Austin, agrees happily.

Austin made staff welfare a priority during the pandemic. Still, an examiner's work can be lonely, even before working-from-home. In Censor, that pressure is no good for Enid. As such, it feels odd to find the BBFC promoting the movie. To Austin, it is proof of a healthy culture. "I would ask: why wouldn't we be friendly with Prano? We're an honest and transparent organisation."

What did he make of the film? “I enjoyed it!” he says, quickly. A pause. No one at the BBFC now would call themselves a censor, he says. “And there were some lines. ‘If in doubt, reject it.’ That is just so far from what we are today.” He looks pained.



Blacklisted ... Theresa Tilly and Bruce Campbell in 1981's *The Evil Dead*, which was effectively banned in the UK. Photograph: Mike Ditz/Allstar/New Line Cinema

Like so much British cinema, *Censor* is a period piece. At one point, Bailey-Bond pans to a front-room TV and news of the miners' strike. Of course, the miners were striking for their livelihoods rather than the right to watch [*Anthropophagus: The Beast*](#) uncut. While the miners also lost, the tribal horror community formed in the video nasty melee not only survived, but entered the mainstream of British film. Its legacy turns up in everything from the hugely popular FrightFest to the movies of [Ben Wheatley](#).

But in the authoritarian gloom of mid-80s Britain, horror felt like one more thing the government didn't like – one more door kicked in. For Bailey-Bond, the era has the fascination we often feel for things we bump into as children. Her parents moved to Wales in the 70s. Her mother was an actor, her father an artist turned set designer. They were followers of [the Indian mystic Osho](#). Their daughter was originally named Prem Prano. “It means

‘lover of life’,” she says. Keen to live in nature, they settled in Penuwch, west Wales. “Properly rural. You wouldn’t even think it was a village.”

The community was a mix. “Some people were there because it was this cosmic land. A few were trying to avoid the police.” Despite the off-the-grid ambience, shelves in the family home brimmed with videos, belonging to her parents and her two older siblings. By 1990, Twin Peaks was on TV. Bailey-Bond watched, enraptured. “I realised this weird, dark stuff was what I loved,” she says. She was in primary school, about eight years old. She wore her sister’s I Killed Laura Palmer T-shirt to the playground. “Someone asked why I was saying I’d killed a random girl. I just rolled my eyes.”

A teenage horror fixation followed. The glam-goth vampire movie The Lost Boys proved the “gateway”. The Evil Dead became an obsession. Bailey-Bond tells a gleeful story about an experimental stage homage during her performing arts BTec. She wasn’t even meant to be the director. “I just took control,” she says.



‘This weird, dark stuff was what I loved’ ... Kyle MacLachlan and Michael Ontkean in the 1990 series *Twin Peaks*. Photograph: ABC Photo Archives/Twin Peaks Productions/Allstar

In her case, early exposure to gore appears less to have corrupted her than instilled a work ethic. Desperate to make films, she moved to London at 18. “I just saw Wales as fields between me and the industry.” She spent the 00s in Soho. There were jobs as a runner and at the post-production house Goldcrest. The older she got, the more she scrutinised the films she watched, asking what they really were, deep in the images.

The industry hubbub around Bailey-Bond now suggests overnight success. Clichés are true about such transformations. For several years, she made darkly inventive short films while collecting rejection emails from funders. “Not having that support was helpful. It let me develop into me,” she says, half smiling. “Let’s say that, anyway.” Finally, in 2015, she made [Nasty](#), a short harking back to the bad old good old days. “That definitely was me.” She started work on Censor soon afterwards.

Ask Austin how he feels about the 80s BBFC and you might think he was talking about a late, disgraced elderly relative. The Video Recordings Act of 1984 gave the BBFC control over the films people watched at home; in the same year, the board dropped the word “censors” from its title. But, to Austin, a more profound change came in 1999. That was when the board switched from airing examiners’ hang-ups to transparent guidelines drawn from public consultation. Twenty-two years later, 10,000 members of the British public are still asked annually to gauge the level of sex and violence that should be viewable by, say, a typical 12-year-old. “I don’t just make up the standards in Soho Square,” Austin says. “Our standards are given to us by the public.”

Other surveys go on year round. They yield endless statistics that dot Austin’s conversation (“95% of teenagers want consistent age ratings between cinema releases and streaming,” he says, casually). He speaks of reflecting public opinion with such passion that you want to gently put a hand on his shoulder. “We’re deeply self-critical. We constantly ask: ‘Are we getting this right? Can we be more transparent?’ Danny, let us know if you have any ideas. I’m in the market for maximum transparency.”

But Austin is canny, too. In the 80s, video nasties spotlit the BBFC. They also obliged it to change in changing times. At its heart, the board is still a curiosity – a non-government body with quasi-legal powers. But its methods

and image have been expertly reshaped. No longer the strict, slightly odd headteacher, it is slick, democratic and chipper. “We’re an ally to families,” Austin says. “We give people the information they need to help decide what they choose to avoid.”

Censorship is problematic. I also think guidelines about whether a film will upset your children are useful

Prano Bailey-Bond

Much of the heat has gone out of the argument. In recent years, few films have moved the board to demand cuts (the 2010 shock-horror [A Serbian Film](#) is perhaps the most notorious). Horror itself feels different now, with female directors breaking through, upending the male violence that once filled the genre. In Britain, Censor follows [Saint Maud, the unnerving 2020 sleeper hit directed by Rose Glass](#). “I don’t see the film as making horror my own,” Bailey-Bond says. “It’s been mine since I was a teenager.”

Yet not everyone is at peace with the BBFC. In 2016, the film-maker Charlie Shackleton pushed back. His objections included its financial model: not profit-making, but reliant on distributors having no choice but to submit their films for certification – and to pay the BBFC to do so, for each minute of screen time. His provocative response was [Paint Drying](#), a 10-hour study of a freshly painted wall. The classification fee was crowdfunded, the issue publicised. (The film got a U.) Shackleton remains a sceptic. “It suits the BBFC to highlight video nasties. They acknowledge the absurdity of their past and tell everyone they’re different now. Then they release another survey to justify their existence.”

The BBFC’s Soho base long sat among companies tied up with cinema and physical media. These days, that is less the case. Like everyone else, it has turned to streaming. The jewel in its crown is Netflix – whose content in Britain is all BBFC rated. (“And 88% of parents found it useful when Netflix started using BBFC classification,” Austin says.) But the relationship is unusual. Rather than submit content to examiners, the company uses an algorithm developed with the board. The bill is substantially cheaper.

Austin wants to work with other big streamers. But the real prize is the internet. If video nasties were an early freakout at rising individualism, online life is the world after the flood. Here, more than movies, is where the questions of the 80s endure. When does “I don’t want to look at this” attract the addendum “and no one else should” or “because they might copy it”? “That was video nasties in a nutshell,” Bailey-Bond says. “It came from people feeling everyone was morally shady, that we’re only ever one film from garotting someone with a shoelace.”



‘Horror has been mine since I was a teenager’ ... Bailey-Bond on the set of Censor.

But the internet remains out of reach. In 2017, the government tasked the BBFC with creating an age-verification system for online pornography. Two years later, the plans were dropped. Austin sounds frustrated. “Masses of work went into that. It would have been highly effective.” Opponents had mocked and expressed unease. Austin is unapologetic. “We would have made children accidentally stumbling into pornography a thing of the past.”

The BBFC keeps asking Britain what it wants classified next. This year, the board has canvassed opinions about racism in films. It also released a survey revealing a preference for British age ratings (reflecting “UK values”) over

European regulations (too lax). Austin insists the research was apolitical. But trying to follow the public mood can take you to unpredictable places.

Either way, what BBFC research most reliably shows is how comfortable people are with the BBFC. No finger is needed on the scales. Austin's case that Britain likes its movies vetted seems self-evident. Bailey-Bond identifies the accommodation. "Censorship is problematic. I also think guidelines about whether a film will upset your children are useful."

But Shackleton sees the board slipping into irrelevance – a safety net that catches no bodies. "Every kid in Britain is in their room looking at anything under the sun with absolutely no regard for its classification or lack thereof. And, as a country, rather than push for greater media literacy, we say OK – let's give every film on Amazon Prime an age rating."

Then again, there was always something performative about the video nasty saga. Whitehouse never watched the films she wanted banned. She knew she didn't need to – that her campaign tapped into something awkwardly primal, our lack of trust in each other and maybe ourselves.

Researching Censor, Bailey-Bond took a break from old favourites to check out the more recent past. It left her troubled. Watching the grotesque A Serbian Film, she became upset. "I thought: I really don't think anyone needs to see this. And *then* I thought: what if this puts ideas in someone's head?" She stops and looks aghast. "Even now, I went straight from one to the other. Even now, Mary Whitehouse is living in my head."

Censor is released in UK cinemas on 20 August

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[Alexis Petridis's album of the week Billie Eilish](#)

Billie Eilish: Happier Than Ever review – inside pop stardom's heart of darkness



A lot on her shoulders ... Billie Eilish. Photograph: ICON

A lot on her shoulders ... Billie Eilish. Photograph: ICON

(Darkroom/Interscope)

On perhaps the most anticipated album of 2021, Eilish uses subdued yet powerful songwriting to consider how fame has seeped into every corner of her life



Alexis Petridis

Thu 29 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

“I’m getting older,” sings Billie Eilish, who’s 19, on Happier Than Ever’s opening track. “I’ve got more on my shoulders”, she adds, which is certainly true. Her debut album [When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?](#) wasn’t just a huge global hit, but an album that significantly altered mainstream pop music. Two years on, streaming services are clotted with bedroom-bound, teenage singer-songwriters dolefully depicting their lives: anticipation for what the genuine article does next is understandably running very high.

When We All Fall Asleep ... was an album that turned universal teenage traumas – romance, hedonism, friendship groups – into knowingly lurid horror-comic fantasies, in which tongues were stapled, friends buried, hearses slept in and marble walls spattered with blood. That playfulness is less evident on its successor. It flickers occasionally, as on Overheated’s exploration of stardom in the era of social media, complete with death threats (“You wanna kill me? You wanna hurt me?” she mumbles, before giggling: “Stop being flirty”) or on NDA, where the “pretty boy” she entices home is required to sign the titular legal agreement before he leaves. But the overall tone is noticeably more sombre.

[Your Power](#) and Getting Older both deal with sexual coercion – the former explicitly, the latter more obliquely – but the album's primary topic is fame and its negative impact on the person at the eye of the storm: stalkers lurk, relationships are ruined, privacy is invaded, an inability to shut off the babble of public opinion about every aspect of your personal life plays havoc with your mental health. The subject even seeps into the album's love songs: on the title track, Eilish wonders if the object of her affections has read her interviews and panics about them revealing all on the internet; My Future struggles to weigh up a romance against the progress of her career.

[Billie Eilish: Your Power review – chilling ballad seeps under your skin](#)

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The music follows suit. If its sonic template is broadly similar to that of its predecessor – vocals that veer from mumbling and whispering to jazz-inflected singing but never lose a sense of intimacy; electronics evidently mixed to be listened to on headphones; the occasional shading of guitar or piano – its sound feels more subdued, less flashy. There are lots of clever production touches – the backing of Goldwing loops its a capella intro, a kind of lush, multi-tracked, easy listening reading of a verse from Hindu text the Rig Veda, in a way that recalls a broadband connection glitching – and a couple of moments where it decisively shifts away from Eilish's previous work, with mixed results: the self-explanatory Billie Bossa Nova feels like a jokey pastiche, but Oxytocin's techno pulse, bursts of atonal synth and vocal that more or less dispenses with melody is really gripping. But the closest it comes to the sonic firework display of Bury a Friend is the title track, which gradually builds from muffled, lo-fi acoustic ballad into an epic finale, multi-tracked vocals over drums and guitars drenched in a peculiar digital form of distortion that's discomfiting and alienating rather than warm and familiar.



The cover of Happier Than Ever. Photograph: PR

Listening to a pop star complaining about being a pop star is usually enervating. It says something about Eilish's skill as a songwriter that, in her hands, the topic feels genuinely affecting. It clearly doesn't sound anything like Black Sabbath or Nirvana, but there are moments when, spiritually at least, Happier Than Ever feels like a 21st-century pop equivalent of the former's *Sabotage* or the latter's *In Utero*, two albums that also succeeded in a painting a compellingly bleak but empathetic picture of stardom. There's something very realistic about the way the righteous anger of both spoken word piece *Not My Responsibility* and *Overheated* – “Is it news? News to who?” – doesn't quite mask the hurt of being judged “for looking just like the rest of you”, or the way the lyrics of *Getting Older* thrash around, jumping from gratitude for her success to horror at the intensity of adulation and the weight of expectation Eilish has attracted. You listen to it and think: yeah, I'd probably feel like that if I were her.

It's worth noting that the songs thus far released from *Happier Than Ever* have received a response muted enough for the singer to respond (“eat my dust,” [she wrote on TikTok](#), “my tits are bigger than yours”). Perhaps that's inevitable, given the music she's made. It's less obviously ear-grabbing and immediate than its predecessor, with lyrics that move away from directly reflecting the lives of her teenage fans: there's not much point in pretending

you're still just like them when you've sold millions, sung a Bond theme and appeared on the cover of Vogue dressed in a custom-made Gucci corset.

But the fact that it's a lower-key album than her debut shouldn't distract from Happier Than Ever's quality. The melodies and vocals are uniformly great; writing about the pressure of fame in a way that elicits a response other than a yawn is an extremely tough trick to pull off, and Happier Than Ever does it with aplomb. And listening to its grimmer lyrical moments, you wonder if an album that dials down her celebrity slightly would be such a bad thing if [Billie Eilish](#) is in it for the long haul, which Happier Than Ever strongly suggests she is.

This week Alexis listened to

Shibashi – All The Lights (ft Aoife Whenyoungh)

A finely crafted dance-pop nugget, All the Lights strikes the perfect balance between melancholy and euphoria.

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Music

Big quiffs, zombies and dead crows: the wild world of psychobilly



King Kurt in February 1984. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy

King Kurt in February 1984. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy

The turbocharged twist on rockabilly enraptured 80s punks and rock'n'rollers – and alienated plenty more – with its food fights, ferocious club nights and phantasmagoria



[Michael Hann](#)

[@michaelahann](#)

Fri 30 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

If you wanted to date the moment one of the biggest youth subcultures of 80s Britain arrived, you could pick 40 years ago this month, on 4 July 1981. That night, at the Marquee club in Soho, a few hundred kids gathered to watch a band who were almost singlehandedly kickstarting a new wave of alternative music. Waiting for them to come on, those fans launched into the song that served as their heroes' unofficial theme, from [David Lynch's Eraserhead](#). "In heaven, everything is fine," they sang. "You've got your good things, and I've got mine." A few months later, that chorus opened, and gave its name to, the first LP by the Meteors. And as their frontman would later claim, "Only the Meteors are pure psychobilly."

In time, psychobilly – a turbocharged twist on rockabilly, the country-enhanced variant on R&B that prefigured the classic rock'n'roll of the late 50s – would become codified. "My take on it would be a much more aggressive, loud approach to rockabilly that must include a double bass, modern lyrics – no cars, pinups or bubble gum – lots of graveyards, vampires, zombies, horror flick and death-influenced lyrics," says Mark Harman of Restless, who came through the psychobilly scene in the early

80s. “Anything goes, really. Overdriven guitars and full rock drum kits, big quiffs, weird and wild clothing, makeup and props – blood and skeletons welcome. It should be fast and loud, exciting and fun.”



Lux Interior of the Cramps. Photograph: Peter Noble/Redferns

But in those early days, psychobilly was still unformed, part of a wider wave of bands in thrall to the whole span of primitive rock'n'roll. The Meteors mixed up their rockabilly rave-ups with [covers of the Rolling Stones](#) and [the Electric Prunes](#). The Milkshakes, fronted by Billy Childish, were [in thrall](#) to the sound of Hamburg-era Beatles; [the Sting-Rays](#) played a version of garage rock laced with psychedelia; [Restless](#) were pure rockabilly; [King Kurt](#) played a Bo Diddley-esque R&B. The founding texts of this tidal wave of trash were records by the Cramps, and before them 60s garage bands such as the Sonics, or rockabilly wild men such as Hasil Adkins and the Phantom.

“I think it existed before the Meteors,” says that band’s original drummer, Mark Robertson. “I suppose the first record is [Love Me](#) by the Phantom [in 1958]. That’s psychobilly. I think the Cramps themselves said: ‘We didn’t invent anything, it was already there. You just had to look for it.’” If the word itself came from Johnny Cash describing a “Psycho-Billy Cadillac” in [One Piece at a Time](#), the Cramps provided a convenient definition in the song [Garbageman](#): “One half hillbilly and one half punk.”

The Meteors took that message to heart. Their singer/guitarist, P Paul Fenech, was a rock'n'roller, their bassist, Nigel Lewis, loved garage rock, and Robertson had been a punk. “We loved the Meteors at the very beginning, in their first incarnation,” says Alec Palao of the Sting-Rays, one of the groups who subsumed all those influences under the banner of “trash”. “All of us had grown up being equally into punk rock and discovering 50s and 60s stuff, and hearing the same kind of wildness in all of these things. So when we saw the Meteors, I was tremendously excited. It gave a legitimacy to this idea of not being a slave to retro authenticity.”



The Meteors backstage at Rock City, Nottingham, May 1981. Photograph: Dave Travis

If the history of punk tends to romanticise the musicians who saw it as an opportunity to explore, psychobilly and trash came from people whose interest in punk was driven by its simplicity. “Punk rock turned into that unpleasant David Bowie-type thing, the New Romantics, and that was very electronic and going away from what rock’n’roll was,” Childish says. As Palao puts it: “People got tired of the pseudo intellectualisation and overblown pomposity of the way rock was going. [Punk](#) rock neutralised that nicely, but then, sadly, a lot of those artists started going down the same pompous road as the people they were railing against.” That was the basis of

trash: music for people who felt Magazine and Joy Division had got everything wrong.

The irony is that the rockabilly crowd disdained the psychobillies just as the psychobillies disdained sophistication. Robertson explains how in 1976, rock'n'roll-loving teddy boys, or teds, were fighting punks on Chelsea's Kings Road. "The Sex Pistols would wind the teds up by wearing drapes. So the teds regarded that as a lack of respect. There would be pitched battles every Saturday between the two tribes. So when somebody came along who looked like rockabillies but played this thing that wasn't authentic rockabilly, that was even worse." The psychobillies, he says, were seen as "undercover punks out to destroy the rock'n'roll scene".

After early Meteors gigs saw the band confronted by baseball-bat wielding rockabillies, they were forced to find their own audience, and develop their own gig circuit away from the traditional rock'n'roll clubs. "Our crowd was a mixture of rockabillies looking for something a bit more punky, and punks looking for something different," says the band's original manager, Nick Garrard. "We picked up a lot of the Adam and the Ants crew that lost interest in Adam when he became a pop star."

In 1982, the trash bands got their own home, when the promoter John Curd set up the [Klub Foot night](#) at the Clarendon in Hammersmith, west London. "The Klub Foot was the Mecca for psychobilly and for neo-rockabilly," Harman says. "It was always a sell-out – they'd come from all over the place. They were the wildest, greatest of times."

"They were wonderful audiences to play for," Palao says. "It was how I imagine the early days of punk rock, where everyone was jumping around having a great time. And then it gets formalised and people come in and it gets a little more sinister and violent, scary, [but] it wasn't like that at the Klub Foot."

Meteors fans developed their own dance, which spread across the scene, known as "wrecking", which entailed little more than frantic flailing of the arms at whoever happened to be nearest. It looked violent, though participants viewed it as largely harmless fun. "It was really the Adam and

the Ants crew coming in that created that wide-scale wrecking," Robertson says. "It probably alienated some people. I suppose it's the same as punk and pogoing. Pogoing was a vertical movement, this was more of a horizontal one. It was a rites of passage thing that certain young blokes need to go through. There was a certain element of proving yourself in that thing."

Not everyone was impressed. "We despised all of that," Childish says. "It was the total antithesis of what we were interested in. We wanted people to politely dance and enjoy themselves." That said, he did not see it as unduly violent. "I saw it as strong male energy. They were quite joyful and exuberant, but anyone who was not into that was basically excluded from the front. If there was any fighting, which did sometimes happen, we'd just put down our instruments. When we got a lot of psychobillies coming along, because we played quite a lot of rock'n'roll, that's when we introduced doing more ballads into the set to get rid of them. If they shouted out for a song, we'd shout back: 'Keep your nose out of band affairs.'"

Psychobilly's most notorious fans were attached to the most notorious band, King Kurt, the only psychobilly group to appear [on Top of the Pops](#), when Destination Zululand reached No 36 in October 1983, and the band appeared with the drummer in excruciating blackface and caricature "tribal" dress.



Billy Childish (right, standing) and the Milkshakes in 1981. Photograph: Eugene Doyen

They initially attracted attention owing to the vertiginous nature of their hair, which was actually an accident, according to their singer, Smeg. “The original thing was that it was kind of like a veil, something to hide behind. It was more down than up. And the idea was that you couldn’t see my head when I was sitting on the tube. And it developed, as I gained confidence, into a more erect kind of affair. You see something you think is cool and then you take it to the nth degree, and that was the nth degree.”

And then the band started offering their fans haircuts, onstage. “We used to cut each other’s hair – nobody would do it in a barber’s – and then we thought: ‘Well, we can charge 20p a haircut.’ Because people would go to us: ‘Where d’you get your hair cut? Nobody’ll do it.’ So we started charging 20p and sometimes did it on stage if people were that way inclined. Some of them were better than others, it has to be said. And some people did come back and say: ‘I lost my job because I had this haircut.’”

Then there was the Wheel of Misfortune, in which a fan was plied with snakebite, then strapped to a wheel, vertically, and spun around (“Quite often people caught up with their own vomit at the bottom of the spin”); and food fights, which led to King Kurt being banned from big venues at the peak of their success because of the mess the group and fans created.



King Kurt in February 1984. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy

As King Kurt's notoriety spread, so their fans responded. "A lot of people were coming to see us and talking about how mad it was: people were throwing offal, seeing what was the weirdest thing they could bring to throw. One girl brought all the dead flies from those zappers you get in food outlets. She had this massive box of dead flies that she was throwing around. I remember drinking this pint and thinking it was full of sultanas, and she said: 'I see you got some of the flies.' Oh fuck. There was a geezer who lived on a farm. They used to shoot the jackdaws and crows, and he got arrested with two carrier bags full of dead crows. The police asked him what he was doing and he said: 'I'm going to see a band.' I don't think they believed him."

And the blackface? "Obviously there are people who see it as totally abhorrent. It wasn't like we were hiding ourselves away and doing something malicious. Maybe it was ill-conceived, with hindsight."

By the mid-80s, psychobilly was everywhere. The first Mark Fowler on EastEnders [was a psychobilly](#) (the actor who played him, David Scarboro, was a Klub Foot regular); the kids' show Grange Hill had its resident psychobilly, [Gripper Stebson](#). Every town had its contingent of flat-tops. But the closed nature of the scene meant it did not cross into the mainstream, and

when the Clarendon was demolished in 1988, the UK scene lost its focal point and psychobilly went back underground.

Yet it never died, spreading around the world and kept alive by new bands and new fans, who also paid tribute to the original groups, many of whom still tour. Each year, pandemics allowing, the tribe assembles at Pineda de Mar in Spain for several days for the Psychobilly Meeting, where all varieties of trash are celebrated. But psychobilly is never celebrated outside the scene – no retrospective features in the heritage mags or reappraisals on Pitchfork. The Meteors used to write songs based on old horror films, and psychobilly's place in alternative music is analogous to something from those movies: the evil mutant, chained up in the attic, where no one can see it.

Childish laughs at the description. “That wouldn’t actually displease some of the participants. I think they might be quite proud of that. And for me that wouldn’t actually be much of an insult. If you call it something that should be locked in the attic, that sounds like you’re writing the sleeve notes to one of their records. I’m sure they’d be pleased as punch with that.”

The next [Psychobilly Meeting](#) is planned for 5-12 July 2022.

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[Opinion](#)[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

We're slowly discovering the murky side of elite sport – thanks to women speaking out

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



The Tokyo Games have shone a light on bullying, abuse and sexualisation, which are too often ignored in the pursuit of glory



‘Many will wonder whether Simone Biles’ loss of nerve has deeper roots.’
Photograph: Ashley Landis/AP

‘Many will wonder whether Simone Biles’ loss of nerve has deeper roots.’
Photograph: Ashley Landis/AP

Fri 30 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Nobody should have to go to work in their bra and knickers. So when the Norwegian women's beach handball team were fined earlier this month for defiantly choosing to [compete in shorts](#) – rather than the buttock-revealingly skimpy bikini bottoms mandated by their sport's governing body – it was the organisers of the European championships, not the squad, who ended up looking ridiculous. Why should female athletes have to be served up half-naked, for the benefit of leering audiences?

But the rebellious Norwegians, it turns out, were merely the tip of a much bigger iceberg. Now the Tokyo Olympics are witnessing what looks very much like the beginnings of a movement, as sportswomen increasingly speak out about their experiences of sexualisation and exploitation.

This year's Games are the first to boast an [almost equal representation](#) of male and female competitors – a nod to egalitarianism underlined when nations were invited to nominate both a man and a woman to [share flag-bearing duties](#) at the opening ceremony. The Games' head of broadcasting, Yiannis Exarchos, has also promised [less lascivious coverage](#) of female athletes, with fewer “close-ups on parts of the body” this year.

These could have been token gestures, but athletes are turning them into something more meaningful before our eyes. A growing willingness among younger women to reveal the darker side of elite sport is shining an uncomfortable light on things too often brushed under the carpet in pursuit of medals and glory.

The scandal engulfing USA Gymnastics – after its squad doctor Larry Nassar was [convicted](#) in 2017 of systematically sexually abusing young athletes in his care – has cast a particularly long shadow over these Games, but they're not alone. An ongoing review of abuse in British gymnastics at all levels has collected reports of bullying, belittling, extreme weight management and training through serious injuries; a [recent survey](#) by the World Players Association found 13% of elite athletes across all disciplines experienced some form of sexual abuse as children in sport, while half reported emotional abuse.

This week the German women's gymnastics team competed not in the traditional thigh-high leotard but in [skin-tight body suits](#) reaching their ankles. They adopted the unitard, previously worn for religious or cultural reasons, back in April in protest against the sexualisation of their sport. Wearing it at the Olympics, team member [Sarah Voss explained](#), signified women's freedom to compete in whatever they felt comfortable wearing.

[Simone Biles is forcing us to think about what sporting success really means](#)
[| Cath Bishop](#)

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But the meaning of that choice deepened days later when Simone Biles, the brilliant 24-year-old American world champion, [withdrew](#) from the team gymnastics final saying she was battling “demons” she feared would hurt her teammates’ chances. After suffering an attack of “the twisties”, a condition where gymnasts lose their sense of space, she had become fearful of injury – devastating in a sport where one split-second mistake can mean a broken neck.

Yet many will wonder whether Biles’ loss of nerve has deeper roots. She is the only squad member competing in Tokyo to have publicly identified herself as a [survivor of Nassar’s abuse](#), and has shouldered much of the burden of fighting for change within sport. To judge by the case of the US fencer [Alen Hadzic](#) – who was allowed to travel to Japan despite three women coming forward with allegations of sexual misconduct against him – that battle is depressingly far from over.

Hadzic, who denies wrongdoing, was cleared to compete subject to an extraordinary “[safety plan](#)” banning him from travelling on the same plane as the rest of the squad or staying in the Olympic village. When his lawyers complained that he wasn’t getting the “experience he has rightfully earned” in Tokyo, the squad united to request that the restrictions remain in place. One fencer [told BuzzFeed News](#) that it had been left to Olympians to deal with the emotional fallout from all this “while simultaneously competing in the biggest event of our lives”.

Days before the Games started, meanwhile, the US Justice Department [released a report](#) on the Nassar case which found the FBI had failed to treat

it with the “utmost seriousness”, noting that at least 40 girls and women claimed to have been molested after the FBI became aware of the allegations. USA Gymnastics has been dogged ever since Nassar’s trial by more widespread claims of a harsh and toxic coaching culture in which young gymnasts were body-shamed, bullied and felt compelled to train on fractured ankles.

Yet inexplicably it’s Biles who stands accused in some quarters of letting down her country, not the other way around – and she is still expected to deliver for a sport that failed to protect her. “We bring them medals. We do our part. You can’t do your part in return?” as she put it last year, calling for an independent investigation into who knew what, and when, about Nassar. It’s striking that by refusing to compete for fear of injury in Tokyo, she was insisting on her right not to be hurt – a right denied to so many gymnasts under his care.

This year for the first time the Games have a safeguarding officer to handle allegations of sexual violence or harassment, in the hope of encouraging victims to come forward. It’s a positive step but it’s hardly a substitute for tackling the kind of culture that helps produce victims in the first place; one where bodies are sexualised and treated as fair game, blind eyes are turned and all that really glitters is gold.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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During the pandemic, a new variant of capitalism has emerged

[Larry Elliott](#)



Spending is up. The world has been fighting a war against Covid, and in wartime the power of the state always increases

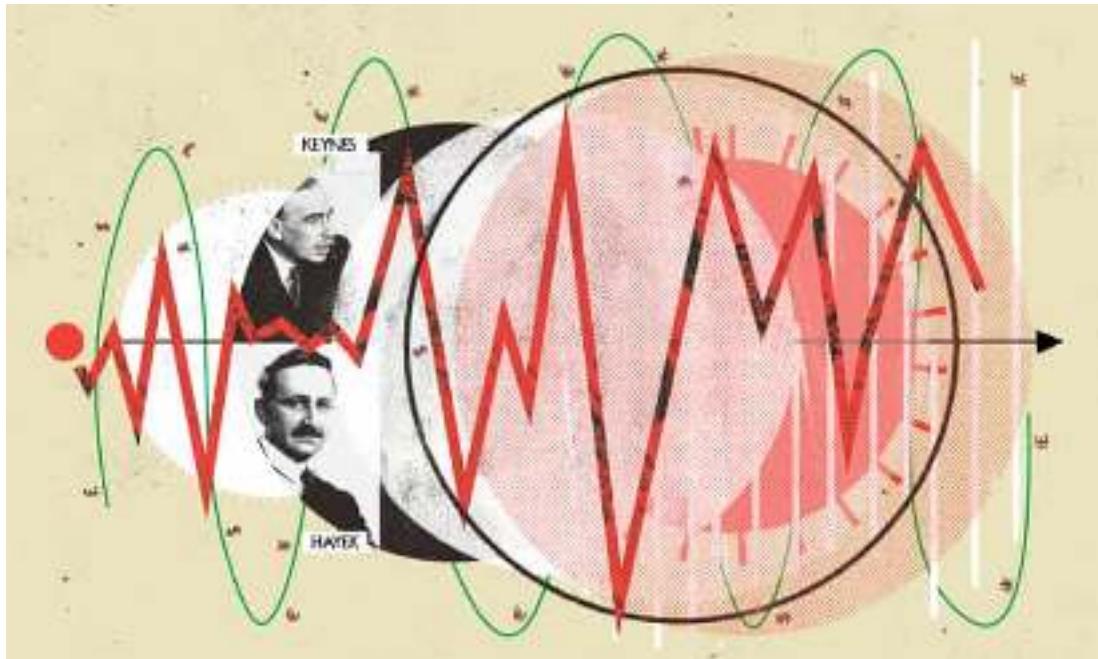


Illustration: Nate Kitch

Illustration: Nate Kitch

Fri 30 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Over the past 18 months, the world has been amazed at how slippery an enemy Covid-19 has proved to be. The virus [first detected in China](#) at the end of 2019 has mutated on a regular basis. Vaccines need to evolve because the virus is changing to survive.

The shock to the global economy from the pandemic has been colossal, but things are now looking up – [especially for advanced countries](#). Some are surprised by the pace of recovery, but they perhaps shouldn't be, because alongside new variants of the virus there has been a new variant of global capitalism.

This matters. For decades the Austrian variant of political economy – the small state, non-interventionist, trickle-down, free-trade, low-tax model based around the ideas of Friedrich von Hayek – was dominant. It replaced the Keynesian variant because in the 1970s a free-market approach was seen as the answer to the challenges of the time: inflation, weak corporate profitability, and a loss of business dynamism.

Not even the biggest fan of capitalism would say it is a perfect system, merely that – so far at least – it has proved more durable than its rivals. And the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances is a big part of that. The state is now a much more powerful economic actor than it was before the pandemic, much to the disappointment of the [free-market thinktanks](#) which are home to Hayek's disciples.

[Cautious optimism over Covid as inflation hits three-year high](#)

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Change was coming even before Covid-19. In retrospect, the last hurrah for the Austrian variant was the aftermath of the 2008-9 financial crisis, a period when the economic orthodoxy insisted on austerity to balance the books.

The upshot was weak growth, low investment, stagnating living standards and a backlash from voters. Central banks found it impossible to raise interest rates from their rock-bottom levels, because so many people on low incomes were [relying on debt to get by](#), and higher borrowing costs would have tipped them over the edge.

At the other end of the spectrum, corporate and personal taxes were cut, and the rich got richer. The big tech giants, minnows themselves in their early days, used their market power to prevent new startups from posing a threat. Voters started to get the impression that the system only really worked for those at the top: and they were right. The populist backlash was aimed primarily at governments, but the real problem was that capitalism was starting to eat itself.

There were signs of a shift, from the middle of the last decade onwards. Donald Trump was no believer in free trade and was proud to call himself “[tariff man](#)”. The unexpectedly strong performance of Jeremy Corbyn at the UK general election in 2017 – with his powerful anti-austerity message – moved the dial too. It led then prime minister Theresa May to pledge an end to [the policy](#). Boris Johnson’s shtick at the 2019 election – and subsequently – has all been about levelling up, not about trickling down.

This process has accelerated since the start of 2020, both at a domestic and global level. Governments of left, right and centre have intervened in their

economies in ways that would have been unthinkable two years ago: paying wages for furloughed workers; keeping businesses afloat through grants and loans; preventing landlords from evicting tenants; and generally throwing financial caution to the wind. The world has been fighting a war against Covid, and in wartime the power of the state always increases.

It has not just been about governments spending and borrowing more, though that is part of the story. Fiscal policy – which covers tax and spending decisions – has taken centre stage for the first time since the Keynesian model ran into trouble in the mid-1970s. Central banks have become bit-players, and are having to fend off the accusation that their prime role is to print the money needed to cover the vast sums finance ministries are spending. The European Central Bank, previously tough in acting against the threat of price rises, has said it will tolerate [more inflation](#) before raising interest rates.

The race to the bottom on tax is coming to an end. US president Joe Biden has said he will pay for his latest spending plans by [raising income tax](#) on Americans earning more than \$400,000 (£290,000) a year. At least 130 countries have signed up to plans, put together by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, for a [minimum global corporate tax rate](#). Critics say the proposal doesn't go far enough, but it is a significant moment nevertheless.

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund is [telling member governments](#) that they need to tackle the entrenched power wielded by a small number of dominant companies – or risk stifling innovation and investment. The IMF says the tech giants are a case in point because “the market disruptors that displaced incumbents two decades ago have become increasingly dominant players”, and they “do not face the same competitive pressures from today’s would-be disruptors”. But it is not just the tech sector. The IMF says the same trend towards falling business dynamism can be seen across many industries.

The building blocks of new-variant capitalism are already there. Governments are going to tax and spend more, and they will use regulatory powers to weaken monopolies. There will be selective use of nationalisation

– as happened with UK defence manufacturer [Sheffield Forgemasters this week.](#)

[Another roaring 20s? We need to do better than that | Dan Davies](#)
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Governments will borrow money to invest in infrastructure projects and to increase the budget for science. Industrial and regional policies will be back in vogue. The idea is to harness the power of the state with the dynamism of the private sector and, as was the case with Keynes, to save capitalism from itself.

There will be pushback, and it would be naive to think otherwise. This is evolution not revolution, and many of the weaknesses of the old order – insecurity at work, for example – remain untouched. Enemies abound. The mixed-economy model is anathema to those who think state intervention is either unnecessary or harmful, and to those who think the demise of capitalism is merely a matter of time.

The new variant of capitalism may prove to be a dud, but for now it has things going for it. These are times that call for a multilateral, collaborative approach, in which rich countries dig deep to help poorer nations, and themselves in the process.

Failings of the old model were exposed in the run-up to the crisis, while the benefits of a more hands-on approach have been demonstrated during the pandemic response. Unsurprisingly, there is appetite for a different way of running the economy. The reason a new variant has emerged is simple: there is a need for something stronger and more resilient than the old model.

Larry Elliott is the Guardian's economics editor

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Wales' eerily beautiful slate quarries are getting the recognition they deserve

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



It's right that these post-industrial landscapes, with their complex history, should have world heritage status



Penrhyn slate quarry in Bethesda, north-west Wales, pictured in 2018.
Photograph: RCAHMW/PA

Penrhyn slate quarry in Bethesda, north-west Wales, pictured in 2018.
Photograph: RCAHMW/PA

Fri 30 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

“The slate quarries are beautiful,” a friend told me, having returned from a holiday in Gwynedd, where I grew up. “They are not so beautiful when your ancestors died in them,” I said, half-joking just to see her face. The windows of my childhood home looked out at that landscape, the mountain a series of gradated ledges, like a staircase built for a giant. The workers were long gone, but I used to imagine them, hanging from thin bits of rope hundreds of feet in the air, risking their lives for a pittance, when I watched the rock climbers who flock to the area from all over the world.

Now, after a long local campaign led by bid leader Dafydd Wigley, the slate landscapes of north Wales have won [world heritage status](#) in recognition of 1,800 years of slate mining; the people, culture and language, and how the slate from these quarries, as is often said, used to roof the world. The skills of the workers, most of them Welsh-speaking, are now consigned only to museum demonstrations. I was quite small when I first watched a man split a slate with a chisel and mallet and saw the purplish sheet become thinner and

thinner beneath his hands. In my father's house there is a [slate fan](#) made by one of our ancestors as an apprentice. There was great pride in those skills, and there continues to be. World heritage status feels like a recognition of that.

[Welsh slate landscape becomes UK's newest world heritage site](#)

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Unesco [has acknowledged](#) the figure of the quarryman in Welsh culture and literature and how he has been lauded “for his progressive politics, loyalty to the Welsh language and cheery nature despite the difficulties his labour inflicted upon his health”.

But it's complicated. The history of the quarry is also a history of enclosure, colonialism and exploitation. As children we used to go up to the quarry hospital and stand in the mortuary, looking at the thick slab of slate where they'd lay the men out, and I'd wonder, if my own ancestor had been taken there, how his loved ones must have felt. As it turned out, he had been. My great-great-great-grandfather was crushed in 1892 by a massive block of slate. The cause of death was listed as heart failure.

Where other schools studied the Romans, we did the quarries. This was essentially a socialist education that emphasised the importance of organised labour, though we didn't realise it at the time. The “bargain”, as it was called, was exploitative: the quarrymen were essentially contractors working sections of rock of varying quality. We were told of the [lockout at Penrhyn quarry](#), which lasted from 1900-1903, after Lord Penrhyn, the aristocratic owner whose fortune derived from the slave trade, tried to break the union. People would place cards in their windows that read: “Nid oes bradwr yn y ty hwn” (“There is no traitor in this house”).



Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd. Photograph: CW Images/Alamy

Whole terraces of houses in the area are still known as “Tai bradwr” – the houses of the traitors – after those who crossed the picket line. Trade union groups from all over Britain made contributions; support came from boilermen, from bookbinders, bakers and confectioners in London, and blastfurnacemen in Cleveland and Durham.

“The lavish houses and parklands of the quarry owners convey the levels of capital achievable from the extraction of this resource,” the Unesco website says, prompting a wry smile. There are still people locally who refuse to set foot in Penrhyn Castle.

When our local quarry closed in the 1960s, a void was left in the community (another ancestor was one of the last to die there, in 1961). As children, the quarries were our playgrounds. We climbed through holes in fences and waded into caves, scratched our names into blocks of slate where people who came before had carved theirs. On the National Trust website there’s a photo of some graffiti. “Am y llech’ yma slafiodd ein Teidia … Bobolbach!” (For these slates our granddads slaved … good grief!“)

Now, the slate quarries are part of the Welsh tourist economy. People flock there to climb the mountains, dive and swim in the former quarry holes, the

waters in which, thanks to some strange combination of minerals, are a vivid turquoise colour. For adrenaline junkies, Zip World – which has the [fastest zipline in the world](#) – occupies the former Penrhyn quarry. World heritage status will hopefully provide more jobs and infrastructure. This is crucial, as is Unesco's emphasis on the importance of the Welsh language; at least 65% of people living within the site are Welsh speakers (this proportion is higher in certain communities).

It's wonderful to see the area acknowledged as the heartland of the Welsh language, which is so frequently belittled or ignored by others within these isles. The quarries are a lesson in the beauty of post-industrial landscapes, in all their complexity and history.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist and author
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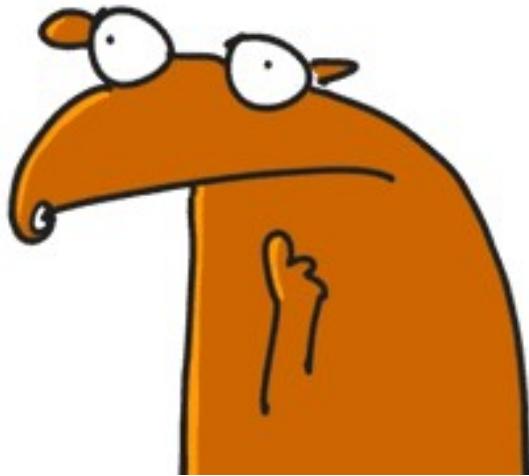
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Fri 30 Jul 2021 03.01 EDT

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- US politics ‘You don’t have to die’: Biden urges Americans
- Google Tech firm becomes latest to delay reopening as Delta spreads
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[US voting rights](#)

Sheila Jackson Lee is third Black lawmaker to be arrested during voting rights protests

Congress members Joyce Beatty and Hank Johnson were previously arrested for participating in separate demonstrations



Sheila Jackson Lee, a Democratic representative of Texas, is arrested as she participates in a voting rights demonstration in Washington DC. Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

Sheila Jackson Lee, a Democratic representative of Texas, is arrested as she participates in a voting rights demonstration in Washington DC. Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

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

Thu 29 Jul 2021 21.06 EDT

Sheila Jackson Lee, a Democratic representative of Texas, was arrested in [Washington DC](#) on Thursday while protesting lawmakers' delay in passing legislation to protect voting rights, becoming the third member of the Congressional Black Caucus to be arrested for civil disobedience in recent weeks.

[Voting curbs enacted in 18 US states this year despite none finding widespread fraud](#)

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Jackson Lee was arrested while participating in a demonstration outside the Hart Senate office building.

“Any action that is a peaceful action of civil disobedience is worthy and more, to push all of us to do better,” Jackson said of her arrest in a video later posted to Twitter.

I engaged in civil disobedience today in the spirit of John Lewis in front of the Senate Hart Building and was arrested. [#GoodTrouble](#)
pic.twitter.com/1CTpfiIQeu

— Sheila Jackson Lee (@JacksonLeeTX18) [July 29, 2021](#)

“Once again we see a Black woman at the forefront of defending our civil rights and leading the fight to save our fragile democracy,” said Odus Evbagharu, chair of the Harris county Democratic party, in a statement. “Congresswoman Lee understands we are at a pivotal moment in the history of our nation, where our sacred right to vote is under grave threat. She recognizes that we all must take action to protect this right.”

Representatives Joyce Beatty of Ohio and Hank Johnson of Georgia were also arrested this month for participating in voting rights demonstrations.

Jackson Lee's arrest came after a House committee hearing with Democratic lawmakers from Texas, who recently staged a high-profile walkout from the state legislature in order to prevent [Republicans](#) from passing restrictive new voting laws.

Texas is already one of the hardest places to vote in the US. Democrat in the state say the proposed laws would make it even harder and further disenfranchise Black and minority voters, by imposing ID requirements on mail-in ballots and banning 24-hour and drive-through voting.

Democrats are working on a revised voting rights bill, after Republicans blocked consideration of a more sweeping proposal last month. The proposed For the People Act failed in an evenly-split Senate along party lines.

Joe Manchin, a moderate Democrat from West Virginia who voted to open debate on the For the People Act despite qualms about some provisions, has offered a scaled-back framework for voting rights legislation. Aspects of his proposal are likely to be incorporated into the Democrats' revision.

But with Republicans opposed to most of the reforms Democrats want to see, it's unclear how lawmakers will pass federal voting rights protection while the filibuster – the Senate's 60-vote supermajority requirement – stands. Voting rights activists have urged Democrats to kill the filibuster and pass legislation quickly as Republicans around the country work to pass voting restrictions.

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‘You don’t have to die’: Biden urges Americans to get vaccinated and calls for incentives – as it happened

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[Google](#)

Uber and Google are latest among tech firms to delay reopening as Delta variant spreads

The companies also announced a vaccine mandate for all employees who will eventually return to offices



Google's headquarters in Mountain View, California, will require in-person employees to be vaccinated when it reopens in October. Photograph: Jeff Chiu/AP

Google's headquarters in Mountain View, California, will require in-person employees to be vaccinated when it reopens in October. Photograph: Jeff Chiu/AP

Kari Paul and agencies

Fri 30 Jul 2021 15.11 EDT

Major tech firms are reversing plans to return to in-office work in coming weeks, as Covid cases in the US rise due to the emergence of a highly transmissible variant of the virus.

Uber, Twitter, Google, Apple and Netflix have delayed planned returns to in-person work recently, while other companies have announced employees can continue remote working indefinitely. The changes come amid the spread of the Delta variant, which now accounts for more than 80% of new coronavirus cases in the US.

On Wednesday, Google said it would delay reopening from early September to mid-October. The company also announced a policy that would eventually require all workers who return to be vaccinated. Apple similarly has moved its reopening date to at least October.

In an email to more than 130,000 Google employees worldwide, chief executive officer Sundar Pichai said the company is now aiming to have most of its workforce back to its offices beginning 18 October instead of its previous target date of 1 September.

[Federal workers must be vaccinated or submit to Covid testing and distancing](#)

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Google's delay also affects tens of thousands of contractors who Google intends to continue to pay while access to its campuses remains limited.

"This extension will allow us time to ramp back into work while providing flexibility for those who need it," Pichai wrote. This marks the third time Google has pushed back the date for fully reopening its offices.

Pichai said that once offices are fully reopened, everyone working there will have to be vaccinated. The requirement will first be imposed at Google's

headquarters in Mountain View, California, and other US offices, and will later be extended to the more than 40 other countries where Google operates.

Facebook announced a similar policy on Wednesday, saying it will make vaccines mandatory for US employees who work in its offices. Apple is [reportedly](#) also considering requiring vaccines.

Uber announced Friday it would delay its office reopening and require vaccines when workers are allowed back. Twitter last week [also halted](#) reopening plans and closed offices due to the Delta variant.

“This is the stuff that needs to be done, because otherwise we are endangering workers and their families,” said Dr Leana Wen, a public health professor at George Washington University and a former health commissioner for the city of Baltimore. “It is not fair to parents to be expected to come back to work and sit shoulder-to-shoulder with unvaccinated people who could be carrying a potentially deadly virus.”

Because children under the age of 12 aren’t currently eligible to be vaccinated, parents can bring the virus home to them from the office if they are around unvaccinated colleagues, Wen said.

The delays from these companies could influence other large employers to take similar precautions, given that the technology industry has been at the forefront of the shift to remote work triggered by the spread of Covid-19. Many [others in the tech industry](#) have decided to let employees do their jobs from remote locations permanently.

LinkedIn on Thursday [reversed a previous decision](#) to require a return to the office, saying its 16,000 employees will have the option to work from home indefinitely. It initially said workers would be required to come back to the office at least 50% of the time. However, those who relocate from cities such as San Francisco to cheaper locations in the US will have their pay docked based on local market rates, the company told Reuters.

Even before the World Health Organization declared a pandemic in March 2020, Google, [Apple](#) and many other prominent tech firms had been telling their employees to work from home.

Google's decision to require employees working in the office to be vaccinated comes on the heels of similar moves affecting hundreds of thousands government workers in California and New York as part of stepped-up measures to fight the Delta variant. On Thursday Joe Biden announced a mandate that all federal government workers be vaccinated.

The rapid rise in cases during the past month has prompted more public health officials to urge stricter measures to help overcome vaccine scepticism and misinformation.

While other major technology companies may follow suit now that Google and [Facebook](#) have taken stands on vaccines, employers in other industries still may be reluctant, predicted Brian Kropp, chief of research for the research firm Gartner. Less than 10% of employers have said they intend to require all employees to be vaccinated, based on periodic surveys by Gartner.

“Google is seen as being such a different kind of company that I think it’s going to take one or two more big employers to do something similar in terms of becoming a game changer,” Kropp said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report

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Federal workers must be vaccinated or submit to Covid testing and distancing

Rule would affect more than 2m civilian employees, but Republicans continue to block preventive measures



As the Delta variant spreads among the unvaccinated, the White House is leaning on federal workers to get the shot. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

As the Delta variant spreads among the unvaccinated, the White House is leaning on federal workers to get the shot. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

*David Smith in Washington
@smithinamerica*

Thu 29 Jul 2021 18.16 EDT

Joe Biden has announced that all civilian federal workers must attest to being vaccinated against the coronavirus or face regular testing and stringent physical distancing, masking and travel restrictions.

Facing a daunting political test as the Delta variant cuts a swath through unvaccinated Americans, the president outlined a more aggressive approach by the federal government and expressed hope that it would offer a model for corporate employers.

But not for the first time, the pandemic response in the US is hampered by partisan politics and a growing divide between the vaccinated and unvaccinated. Biden's intervention was likely to produce a renewed backlash from Republican politicians warning against government encroachment on individual freedom.

The highly infectious Delta variant has caused coronavirus cases and hospitalisations to rebound in many parts of the US, which is averaging nearly 62,000 new Covid-19 infections a day. The vast majority of those hospitalised and dying have not been vaccinated.

Calling it a "pandemic of the unvaccinated", Biden noted on Thursday that about 90m Americans who are eligible for a shot have not yet got one. "Masking is one defense against the spread of Covid-19 but make no mistake: vaccines are the best defence against you getting severely ill from Covid-19. The very best defence."

Signalling a shift in tone for the administration, he said in the East Room of the White House: "In addition to providing incentives to encourage vaccination, it's time to impose requirements on key groups to ensure they're vaccinated.

"Every federal government employee will be asked to attest to their vaccination status. Anyone who does not attest or is not vaccinated will be required to mask, no matter where they work, test one or two times a week

to see if they've acquired Covid, socially distance, and generally will not be allowed to travel for work.”

The president added: “Likewise, today, I’m directing my administration to take steps to apply similar standards to all federal contractors. If you want to do business with the federal government, get your workers vaccinated.”

The federal government is America’s biggest employer, including about 2.18 million civilian workers, while another 570,000 people work for the postal service, according to 2020 data. The workers are spread across the country, including many in states where vaccine scepticism runs high.

Paul Light, a public service professor at New York University, told the Associated Press before the announcement, “If the federal government were to say that everybody who works for the government directly or indirectly must be vaccinated, that’s a massive footprint.”

It was unclear whether the new requirement would apply to the postal service. But the White House said Biden was directing his team to take steps to apply similar standards to the Department of Defense to look into how and when it will add Covid-19 vaccination to the list of required vaccinations for members of the military.

But the pandemic response continues to divide the country, with some Republicans already pushing back at the new guidance.

Ralph Norman, a congressman from South Carolina, said: “To require individuals to provide proof of vaccination would be a massive intrusion on the doctor-patient relationship and the privacy of the individual.”

Congress itself has become a partisan battleground over the issue after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued guidance on Tuesday that vaccinated people should wear masks indoors in areas of substantial or high Covid-19 transmission.

Some Republicans revolted after the US Capitol’s attending physician sent a memo informing members that masks would again have to be worn inside the House of Representatives at all times.

The Democratic House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, called the Republican House minority leader, Kevin McCarthy, “a moron” after McCarthy tweeted: “The threat of bringing masks back is not a decision based on science, but a decision conjured up by liberal government officials who want to continue to live in a perpetual pandemic state.”

The head of the US Capitol police announced that congressional aides and visitors to the House side of the Capitol will face arrest if they are not wearing masks.

Republicans also forced a vote to adjourn the chamber in protest against the mandate, which was defeated along mostly party lines, and there were angry confrontations between members in the corridors.

Many Republican state leaders are blocking preventive measures, potentially making it harder to tame virus outbreaks in conservative communities. At least 18 Republican-led states have moved to prohibit vaccine passports or to ban public entities from requiring proof of vaccination. Some have prohibited schools from requiring any student or teacher to wear a mask or be vaccinated.

Biden, a champion of bipartisanship, pointedly praised the efforts of Mitch McConnell, the Republican Senate minority leader, and Kay Ivey, the Republican governor of Alabama, to get people vaccinated.

He added: “People are dying and will die who don’t have to die. If you’re out there unvaccinated, you don’t have to die. This is not about red states and blue states. It is literally about life and death. It’s about life and death.”

Seeking to pre-empt criticism from the right, the president said: “I know people talk about freedom, but I learned growing up ... with freedom comes responsibility. Your decision to be unvaccinated impacts someone else. Unvaccinated people spread the virus.”

Divisions extend to workers, however. Richard Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO union, told the CSPAN network that its members support vaccine mandates. “If you come back in and you are not vaccinated, everybody in that workplace is jeopardised,” Trumka said.

But the American Postal Workers Union said it opposed a vaccine mandate for federal employees and expressed concern about Biden's announcement. "While the APWU leadership continues to encourage postal workers to voluntarily get vaccinated, it is not the role of the federal government to mandate vaccinations for the employees we represent," the group said in a statement.

Biden also announced that small- and medium-sized businesses will be reimbursed for offering their employees paid leave to get their family members, including their children, vaccinated.

He called on states, territories and local governments to do more to incentivise vaccination, including offering \$100 to those who get vaccinated. "Here's the deal: if incentives help us beat this virus, I believe we should use them. With incentives and mandates, we will make a huge difference and save a lot of lives."

And, in an effort to get more children 12 and older vaccinated, Biden urged school districts nationwide to host at least one pop-up vaccination clinic over the coming weeks.

Biden missed his goal of having 70% of adults get at least one shot by 4 July; the latest figure is 69.3%. About 60% of American adults have been fully vaccinated meaning that, despite a head start, it now has a lower share of fully vaccinated people than the European Union and Canada.

Companies including Google have announced vaccine mandates. Delta Air Lines and United Airlines are requiring new employees to show proof of vaccination. Goldman Sachs is requiring its employees to disclose their vaccination status but is not mandating they be vaccinated.

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Tokyo 2020: tennis gold for Bencic, China top medal table and more – as it happened

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Nigeria's Blessing Okagbare out of women's 100m semis after doping ban

- Okagbare tested positive for human growth hormone on 19 July
- Sprinter, 32, had been due to race Dina Asher-Smith in semi-final



Blessing Okagbare has been handed a provisional doping ban on the day of her 100m semi-final. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

Blessing Okagbare has been handed a provisional doping ban on the day of her 100m semi-final. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

PA Media

Sat 31 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

Nigerian sprinter Blessing Okagbare is out of the Tokyo Olympics after being handed a provisional doping ban on the day of her 100 metres semi-final.

The [Athletics](#) Integrity Unit announced that Okagbare had “tested positive for human growth hormone” in an out-of-competition test on 19 July.

[Tokyo 2020 Olympics: gymnastics, basketball, athletics and more – live!](#)
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That resulted in a mandatory suspension, coming on the day that Okagbare was due to race against Great Britain’s Dina Asher-Smith and second-fastest qualifier Elaine Thompson-Herah in their semi-final in Tokyo.

She had finished first in her heat for the women's 100m on Friday, recording a time of 11.05sec to beat Britain's Asha Philip and Tynia Gaither of the Bahamas. That put the 32-year-old into a third consecutive Olympic semi-final.

Okagbare, who won Olympic silver in the long jump in Beijing 13 years ago and world championship silver at Moscow 2013, holds the Commonwealth Games record of 10.85 in the women's 100m, set in Glasgow in 2014.

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[The Observer](#)[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Team GB smash world record to win Tokyo 4x100m mixed medley relay gold

- Kathleen Dawson, Adam Peaty, James Guy and Anna Hopkin win
- Fourth gold and seventh medal for GB in Tokyo Olympic pool

00:59

'I couldn't believe it': Anna Hopkin and Kathleen Dawson on mixed medley relay gold win – video

[Andy Bull](#) at the *Tokyo Aquatics Centre*
Fri 30 Jul 2021 23.43 EDT

Another day and, incredible to say, another gold for Great Britain in the Olympic swimming pool. This one in the mixed 4x100m relay, which the

quartet of Kathleen Dawson, [Adam Peaty](#), James Guy and Anna Hopkin won in a world record time of 3min 37.58sec.

It was Britain's fourth swimming gold medal of the week, which is as many as the team won at the Olympics between 1988 and 2016, and their seventh swimming medal here. The last time a Games went this well the men were wearing wool bodysuits and waxed moustaches, and the women were not allowed to compete. If they win one more medal on Sunday, it will be their most successful swimming Games.

[Kaylee McKeown leads Australian charge as Olympic swimmers win four more medals](#)

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It was the first time this mixed relay has featured on the Olympic programme and the novelty made for an array of different approaches as the teams tried to figure out the best strategy. The US, who looked the strongest team, were the only ones who put a man, Caeleb Dressel, on the final freestyle leg.

It was asking a lot of him, given he had already won the 100m butterfly final in a world record time, as well as a 50m freestyle semi-final, in the session. “GB, that was insane,” he said.

China, who came second, and bronze medallists Australia also picked swimmers who had been in action. The British had an advantage because their swimmers were relatively fresh. It wasn't an accident. Guy had been due to compete in the 100m butterfly alongside Dressel but pulled out to concentrate on the relay. The decision paid off, because he turned in a split of 50sec dead, which put the team in first place, but it came at the cost of a shot at winning his first individual medal. If he had been able to replicate that kind of time from a standing start in the individual final, he would have won bronze.

“It did hurt pulling out from the butterfly,” he said, “but I made the compromise and I got a gold medal and a world record, so I'll take that.”

His sacrifice gave the team an edge their closest rivals did not have. It also vindicated the decision to leave out Duncan Scott, despite his red-hot form. “I’ve been racing with Jimmy for 10 years,” Peaty said. “One of our biggest strengths is that we’ve got heritage, and brotherhood, that no other team has.”

Peaty swam a barnstorming breaststroke leg, in 56.78sec. He swept past the US’s 17-year-old 100m champion, Lydia Jacoby, who ploughed on even though her goggles had come off.



Anna Hopkin brings Team GB home with the win and a new world record, 1.28sec ahead of China, who took silver, while Australia took third.
Photograph: Maddie Meyer/Getty Images

It meant that by the time Hopkin hit the water for the freestyle closer, she had a half-second lead over China. Hopkin, who trains with Peaty under coach Mel Marshall, swam brilliantly and finished in 52sec. “These guys got me such a great lead, I knew I could stay ahead of the girls,” she said.

That still left Dressel, the greatest sprint swimmer in the world, who was starting from eighth place, six seconds back. “I knew he was coming at me,” Hopkin said, “but there’s just so much going on there’s no point looking at anyone else, I just knew I was not going to lose that lead.”

And now, she added: “It’s pretty cool to say I beat Caeleb Dressel.”

It was Peaty’s 14th world record, his fourth Olympic medal and his third gold. If you are looking for reasons why fortunes have changed so much in the past few years, Dawson, who swam the opening backstroke leg, and Hopkin said you should start with him and the example he sets for the rest of the team.

Not that Peaty was going to claim any credit for it. “British swimming has completely flipped, it’s incredible, and it’s down to people back home finding the 1% improvements,” he said. “There’s a whole orchestra of people I want to thank.”

He mentioned his support team, who had stayed up all night to make sure Peaty had the data he needed when he woke up in the morning.

“I hope this team and the rest of British swimming get the respect they deserve, because it’s been hard. People don’t understand how hard it is, hopefully they do now,” he said. “People don’t know how hard it is to get to this point, I’ve been doing this since 2014, seven years, and I didn’t think the team would be where they are today.

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“Hopefully, for all those kids back home who haven’t had access to pools [during lockdown], this gives them the kickstart they need, because there’s no point doing any of this if we’re not inspiring people.

“That’s what the Olympics are about, right, to do better and to chase dreams.”

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[The Observer](#)[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Team GB win triathlon relay as Jonny Brownlee ends jinx and finally gets gold

- Alex Yee anchors team for GB's seventh gold of Tokyo Games
- Jessica Learmonth and Georgia Taylor-Brown complete quartet
- USA come home in silver as France finish with bronze

01:01

'It's an incredible event': Zaferes reflect on first mixed triathlon at the Olympic Games - video

[Sean Ingle](#) at Odaiba Marine Park

[@seaningle](#)

Fri 30 Jul 2021 20.27 EDT

The curse is over, the set complete. For nine long years, [Jonny Brownlee](#) has not dared touch his brother Alistair's Olympic gold medals, because he feared it would jinx his own dream of reaching the highest step on the podium. But on a sweaty and entrancing morning at the Odaiba Marine Park, Jonny finally bounded out of his brother's shadow and into history as Team GB won the first Olympic triathlon mixed relay by 14 seconds from the United States, with France third.

[‘I’m no hero’: Australian distance runner Patrick Tiernan drags himself across line](#)

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“Olympics? Completed it,” Brownlee said, the gold glittering around his neck adding to his individual bronze from London 2012 and silver medal from Rio 2016. “It feels absolutely amazing. It’s my third Olympics and I’ve finally got gold.”

“It’s also the first ever mixed team relay in triathlon so we’ve made history in that, too. It’s capped off my Olympic career amazingly.”

It was a thrilling race, with each athlete having to complete a 300m swim, 6.8km bike, and 2km run before tagging off to their next teammate, but Team GB were always in pole position.

Jessica Learmonth led them out and immediately put Britain into a group of four with the US, Germany and the Netherlands, who had a large lead over the field, before Brownlee took over. He pushed hard on the bike to extend the group’s lead, before going solo on the run to establish a 10-second gap.

With two individual silver medallists, [Georgia Taylor-Brown](#) and [Alex Yee](#), on the final two legs, the sense of excitement in the British camp was growing by the second. And so was the lead.



Jessica Learmonth leaves the water after her swimming leg as she gets Team GB's relay off to an excellent start. Photograph: Francisco Seco/AP

By the time Yee began the anchor leg with a 23-second advantage, gold looked in the bag. However France's men's world No 3 Vincent Luis had other ideas, riding like a man possessed on the bike to get on to Yee's wheel.

These two had a particular history. Back at London 2012, Luis had been asked if he had any ideas to help a young British triathlete with talent – and decided to go the extra mile by sending him his Olympic kit. That athlete? Yee.

Yee, though, was not going to let sentimentality get in the way of a gold medal. The 23-year-old, who was faster than Mo Farah as a teenager and good enough to have competed for Britain at the European Athletics Championships aged 20, soon powered clear towards glory – and Team GB's seventh gold of these Games.

But after jumping into the team's arms in the finish, Yee then sought out Luis to thank him for his gesture nine years ago. As the Briton later explained: "I remember receiving a parcel from France and thinking it was really quite odd. But it was from Vince and he sent some of his Olympic kit."

I was so young at the time and I remember thinking: ‘Wow, this is really amazing.’



Jonny Brownlee (right) on his 6.8km bike leg, on his way to team gold.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

“He is someone that inspired me so much. Vince is one of the people I look up to the most in the sport. It was pretty special. He’s just a legend.”

Yee also insisted that he was fully in control, despite a momentary wobble when he was briefly headed by Luis on the bike. “I did panic a little bit,” he said. “But I’d had a lot of information around the course so I knew Luis was coming fast and he’d worked quite hard. And I knew I’d probably be able to get him on the run if I stayed with him on the bike.

“I also back myself to run well so I guess I played to my strengths and was a little bit cunning in a way but I’m really happy.”

Not everyone in the British team was quite as relaxed. As Learmonth admitted towards the end she was “slightly nervous” – adding: “I think the relay you’ve got a lot more pressure than in the individual.”



Georgia Taylor-Brown, who took silver in the women's individual event, on her 2km run. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

But this day, most of all, was about Brownlee the Younger finally getting the gold medal his talent has long deserved after more than a decade as one of the world's elite triathletes.

It has been some ride. During that time the 31-year-old has been a world champion, Commonwealth champion, and – incredibly – finished on the podium in each of the 42 races he competed in between July 2010 and May 2014. He has also won two Olympic medals – although with the added sting of being pipped by his elder brother on both occasions. Now, though, he ends his Olympic triathlon career with the highest of highs.

“I don’t really know what to say,” Brownlee said. “If someone had said at the start of my international career I’d have three Olympic medals and three different colours I’d have taken that. It’s super-special.

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“And the way we all raced was amazing. Jess set us up perfectly, we didn’t make any mistakes, we did everything as well as we could and Alex finished it off. To finally get a gold medal, I’m quite emotional.”

He wasn't the only one. At the finish line, Alistair was waiting to welcome his brother into an exclusive gold medal club. "I know for a long time that Jonny's wanted gold," he told the *Observer*. "But he never wanted to touch my medals as he thought it was bad luck. It's awesome for him and I'm really happy." The sustained cheers from the Team GB entourage showed he was far from alone.

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‘The war has changed’: CDC paper warns Delta variant is far more transmissible

Rochelle Walensky says ‘extreme’ measures needed to counter threat of virus that can be spread even by vaccinated people



A person wears a face mask in the Oculus Mall in New York City on 29 July. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

A person wears a face mask in the Oculus Mall in New York City on 29 July. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

[Adam Gabbatt](#), [Natalie Grover](#) and [Jessica Glenza](#)

Fri 30 Jul 2021 15.06 EDT

The Delta variant spreads much faster, is more likely to infect the vaccinated, and could potentially trigger more severe illness in the unvaccinated compared with all other known variants, according to an internal report compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The document, a slide presentation prepared by officials within the US's health protection agency first [obtained by the Washington Post](#), warned that the Delta variant is as infectious as chickenpox, and argues that government officials must "acknowledge the war has changed" given how dangerous the variant is.

Citing data from an outbreak in a county in Massachusetts, the CDC document suggested that infections in vaccinated people can produce viral loads similar to those who are unvaccinated and infected with the variant.

However, scientists acknowledge that the likelihood of vaccinated people spreading the virus, if infected, is much rarer compared with unvaccinated people.

The Delta variant is more transmissible than other viruses in the coronavirus family such as Mers and Sars, as well as Ebola and smallpox, the CDC presentation said, adding that although vaccines prevent more than 90% of severe disease, the dangerous characteristics of this variant suggest they may be relatively less effective at preventing infection or transmission.

"I think people need to understand that we're not crying wolf here. This is serious," Rochelle Walensky, the director of the CDC, told CNN. "It's one of the most transmissible viruses we know about. Measles, chickenpox, this – they're all up there."

The report was leaked only days after the agency changed its guidance to recommend that even vaccinated people should wear masks in some indoor settings, regardless of their vaccination status, especially in areas of "substantial or high" virus transmission.

Later on Friday, the CDC released more detail on the Massachusetts outbreak among vaccinated people that informed its decision to revise mask guidance, which has prompted a backlash from conservatives across the US.

It found that around the 4 July holiday on Cape Cod, an outbreak sickened 469 people though the majority (74%) were vaccinated. Among samples that could be sequenced, the CDC found the vast majority had the Delta variant.

Data shared in the presentation suggested that vaccinated people who become infected with the Delta variant can shed just as much of the virus as unvaccinated people, although it emphasized that vaccines prevent more than 90% of severe disease.

Dr Stephen Griffin, a virologist from the University of Leeds, emphasized that breakthrough infections are not common (1-2% according to the latest Public Health England summary, although with the different symptoms of Delta this may be underestimated).

“However, it is concerning that when such infections do occur that the titers [concentration of the virus] in the airway appear the same as during a non-vaccinated infection … it seems that the outbreaks mentioned are consistent with a high degree of infectious virus being produced,” Griffin told the Guardian.

“We must remember though, going forward, that we will see a greater proportion of [vaccinated people] becoming infected as the coverage increases within the population, but the difference here is that Delta certainly appears to do this more often and with more potential for symptomatic infection compared to other variants.”

The CDC document also highlights “communication challenges” and says the agency must change its public messaging to emphasize vaccination as the best defense against the Delta variant.

The US is averaging almost 62,000 new Covid-19 infections a day, and the vast majority of those hospitalised and dying have not been vaccinated. Nationwide 49.8% of Americans are fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

On Thursday Joe Biden described the surge as a “pandemic of the unvaccinated”, and said about 90 million Americans who are eligible for a shot have not yet got one.

“Masking is one defense against the spread of Covid-19 but make no mistake: vaccines are the best defence against you getting severely ill from Covid-19. The very best defence,” the president said.

This article was amended on 31 July 2021. A previous version referred to titers in terms of the concentration of “an antibody” in the airway, when it meant to say concentration of “the virus”.

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UK appears to defy dire ‘freedom day’ predictions as Covid cases fall

Government will not say they believe worst is over, but cases fell for seven consecutive days this week

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People queue at a Covid vaccination centre in London: the government aims to vaccinate 3m more young people this summer. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

People queue at a Covid vaccination centre in London: the government aims to vaccinate 3m more young people this summer. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Ian Sample](#)

Fri 30 Jul 2021 12.34 EDT

As England's "[freedom day](#)" dawned on 19 July, Boris Johnson was grumpily confined to his 16th-century grace-and-favour mansion, humiliated by the row over a bungled quarantine exemption. Cases were at more than 46,000 per day as all legal restrictions lifted and the international press called it Britain's great gamble.

Almost a fortnight later, despite dire predictions, the UK's cases are falling. Downing Street does not quite dare to be jubilant but cases fell for seven consecutive days this week for the first time since November, though the last few days have seen a slight rise. On Thursday, cases were down by 40% on the week before.

The explanations have been varied – the end of the "Euros effect", the school holidays, a decline in testing, or a final approach towards herd immunity – but nothing conclusive.

[Music, fast food and mud at London's summer vaccine festival](#)

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No one inside government will say they believe the worst is over – political and scientific advisers have been burnt too many times. Even Johnson has restrained himself, privately telling his aides: "We need to see if this is a bactrian camel or a dromedary – does it have one hump or two?"

"We are not hanging 'mission accomplished' signs," one senior government aide said. "The uncertainty is pretty high. I think it would be foolish to pretend there wasn't a decent chance of another increase in cases."

Initially, as cases dipped for a few successive days, Whitehall sources said there was a feeling inside government that the data was an outlier. But after seven consecutive days, the trend can no longer be dismissed.

“It’s definitely a trend. Now we do need to see this sustained – this pandemic has been very unpredictable. We can’t yet make a call about the course of this wave.”

Next Friday is the point when Johnson may finally be able start saying the country has turned a corner. The cases still do not show the impact of the final stage four lifting. “It’s only then when we will really know for sure if we are seeing what we think we are seeing,” one Whitehall source said.

“And that will be a moment of relief if it does continue to drop after that because ultimately we want people to get on with their lives, to get off furlough, to reopen their businesses, we wanted them to do that and it means a lot to millions of people and of course we want that to have been the right decision.”

It is still unclear, even to the country’s most esteemed modellers and epidemiologists, what exactly is going on.

The sharpness of the peak suggested that it wasn’t driven by immunity. Levels of immunity differ across the country, and that being the case, different regions would reach their peaks at different times before cases began to fall. The result would be cases plateauing and remaining stable for some weeks before eventually trending downwards.

A closer look at the data showed that cases had soared in young men during the Euros – the virus surged when they met up in homes and pubs to watch the semifinal and final – creating what one modeller called “a wave within a wave”.

After the final at Wembley on 11 July the surge of new cases soon petered out. It wasn’t sufficient on its own to produce the rapid drop in cases, but with immunity and broadly synchronous school closures, better weather, and potentially changes in whether people tested, there was enough to drive cases down.

There are also some signs that the UK could be on the cusp of some form of herd immunity, even if the virus is likely to endure indefinitely. Dr Meaghan

Kall, an epidemiologist at Public [Health](#) England, suggested most age groups were getting “very close to herd immunity” because of antibody data.

Prof Tim Spector, who runs the [Zoe Covid Symptom Study](#), which uses an app to get people to report when they are suffering coronavirus symptoms, said his figures suggest cases are running at about twice the level recorded on the government’s dashboard. He said young people may be choosing not to get tested.

“It’s dropped something like 30% in two days, which is pretty much unheard of in pandemics, and remember this is happening without restrictions, without lockdowns, without some sudden event,” he told Sky News. “To me, it looks a bit fishy. It looks as if there’s some other explanation for this other than suddenly the virus has given up.”

None of the modelling published by Sage factored in the Euros and none anticipated the past week’s sharp fall in cases. Modellers say that reflects the difficulty of predicting human behaviour: certainty about the weeks and months ahead was always impossible.

And while the models made this clear – the Sage scenarios ranged from a minor third wave to thousands of daily hospitalisations – the vast uncertainty in what would happen this summer was somehow lost in the messaging.

“A little more humility in the face of uncertainty would do everyone some good,” said Mark Woolhouse, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at Edinburgh University.

“I think that modellers admit themselves that it is not easy to know why this is happening,” one senior government source said. “Certainly the scientific advisors are cautious. I think the change of approach you’ve seen from some of the modellers over the last week shows you how hard this is to predict.”

In Whitehall, one of the theories is that there continues to be sustained public caution, despite the change of enforcement. “People are still generally wearing masks, keeping their distance,” one adviser said. “That means you still see the effects of that caution. People know now what the behaviours are that will protect them and those appear to be still being used.”

“The advice when we did step four was, you will have an exit wave whenever you open up, and how that plays out will be dependent on individual behaviour. We do think now that people know very well what to do and they do take reasonable precautions, especially if they are at risk or know people who are.”

4. ONS Infection survey shows high Ab levels

NEW Antibody (green line, modelled) by age group:

- 25-34 now 81% (!)
- 35-49 now 94.5% (!)
- 50+ over 96%

This will be very close to herd immunity levels in these ages, thru vaccination & previous infection <https://t.co/5vwnIUPwZH> pic.twitter.com/y7CTCrlGUQ

— Meaghan Kall (@kallmemeg) [July 7, 2021](#)

Over the summer, Johnson and other ministers will ramp up a campaign to get 3 million more young people vaccinated, a key gap in the UK’s coverage though the take-up rate among young people is 63%, still a significant majority.

“I think one of the things we can say is that this wave conclusively proves how effective the vaccines are,” one Whitehall source said. “Vaccines have prevented 60,000 deaths. That’s extraordinary compared to where we were.”

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California expands Covid restrictions as Delta variant threat grows

Infections and hospitalizations are rising in the state as health officials fear not enough people are vaccinated



A man wearing a mask walks into a grocery store in Los Angeles.
Photograph: Chris Delmas/AFP/Getty Images

A man wearing a mask walks into a grocery store in Los Angeles.
Photograph: Chris Delmas/AFP/Getty Images

Guardian staff and agencies
Fri 30 Jul 2021 15.39 EDT

California's public health agency this week recommended that people wear masks indoors regardless of their vaccination status, one of several steps taken across the state as part of an urgent effort to curb the rise of coronavirus infections.

"The Delta variant has caused a sharp increase in hospitalizations and case rates across the state. We are recommending masking in indoor public places to slow the spread while we continue efforts to get more Californians vaccinated," said Dr Tomás J Aragón, the state's public health officer, in a statement on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, counties, cities, school districts and employers across the state have announced their own measures around masking and vaccinations, sometimes going further than federal and state recommendations.

[California and New York City to mandate vaccine for government workers](#)
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Although case numbers in California remain well below the winter peak, infections and hospitalizations are rising and health officials fear that not enough people are vaccinated to curb the spread of the Delta variant. In California, more than 62% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated, but vaccination rates vary widely across counties.

With its indoor masking recommendation, California is following the lead of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state officials said. The CDC reversed course on masking rules on Tuesday and advised fully vaccinated people to mask up in public indoor settings in areas where transmission is high or substantial.

California officials said more than 90% of the state's nearly 40 million residents live in areas where community spread is high or substantial. The seven-day positivity rate in the state has jumped to 5.9% from 1.4% a month ago.

Dr Rochelle Walensky, the CDC director, said the vaccine protects most people from becoming seriously ill or dying. But she added that unlike with

previous variants, new data shows that [vaccinated people infected with the Delta variant](#) “have the potential to spread that virus to others”.



A woman wearing a mask enters a drugstore in Monterey Park, California.
Photograph: Frederic J Brown/AFP/Getty Images

Los Angeles, Sacramento and Yolo counties have instituted mask mandates for everyone, regardless of vaccination status, indoors. San Francisco’s mayor, London Breed, [said her city was considering similar measures](#).

In other measures to curb transmission, the California governor, Gavin Newsom, said on Monday that more than 2.4 million state and healthcare workers will have to provide proof of vaccination or be tested.

The announcement came shortly before Joe Biden required federal workers to sign forms attesting they have been vaccinated or else comply with new rules that include mandatory masking, weekly testing and distancing.

In announcing the vaccinate-or-test policy this week, Newsom said he wanted to encourage other employers to do the same, and several cities, school districts and private employers followed suit.

San Francisco is requiring new hires get vaccinated or get an exemption before they start work, while an estimated 35,000 employees already on the

job must show proof of inoculation, seek an exemption or risk disciplinary action once the vaccines are given full approval by the Food and Drug Administration.

California State University, the largest four-year university system in the US, had already announced it was requiring faculty, staff and students to be immunized against Covid-19 if they plan to be on campus this fall.

[Google becomes latest tech firm to delay reopening as Delta variant spreads](#)
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In San Jose schools, officials will require everyone to mask up indoors and outdoors. The San Jose Unified school district, with more than 30,000 students, also said it will require teachers and staff to get inoculated against the coronavirus or get tested twice a week for the coronavirus.

The Los Angeles school district will require all students and employees to take weekly coronavirus tests, regardless of their vaccination status.

Google and Uber this week [backtracked on plans](#) to welcome most workers back to offices in September, becoming the latest in a list of Silicon Valley companies to delay reopening. The companies also said they would be rolling out a policy that will eventually require everyone who returns in person to be vaccinated.

Apple and Netflix had earlier said they would postpone calling employees back to the office. Twitter [also halted](#) reopening plans and closed offices last week due to the Delta variant.

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[Rights and freedom](#)[Family](#)

The knock that tears families apart: ‘They were at the door, telling me he had accessed indecent images of children’



‘The police said: life is never going to be the same again.’ Photomontage: GNM Imaging/Getty

‘The police said: life is never going to be the same again.’ Photomontage: GNM Imaging/Getty

Every month in the UK, hundreds of homes are visited by police officers dropping a bombshell: someone has been viewing images of child abuse. What happens to the families left behind?

Rights and freedom is supported by



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[Harriet Grant](#)

Sat 31 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

It was an ordinary summer evening in 2016 for Emma when her ex-husband, Ben, dropped their young children back after a weekend visit at his place. The couple had been divorced for less than a year. Their split had brought with it the usual pain and sadness that comes when a long relationship ends, but things were amicable. He lived nearby in the town they had grown up in and saw the children almost daily. Emma was running a bath for the kids when she heard a knock on the door: “I thought he had forgotten something.” Instead, she was confronted by a female police officer, behind whom was her ex-husband, standing by his car, surrounded by plainclothes police.

“I immediately thought someone was dead,” Emma says. “The policewoman told me to settle the children in front of the TV and before she even had time to tell me what had happened, the senior officer came in, looked me in the eye and said: ‘I’m so sorry, life is never going to be the same again. The next few months are going to be hell.’ And then they told me they were arresting Ben for accessing indecent images of children. I felt like the world dropped away.”

Stunned, Emma watched as officers searched the house and pulled out drawers, looking for phones and laptops. They took every device they could find and even packed up the children's games consoles. As they did this, "the policewoman sat me down in the kitchen and explained what an indecent image was. She was saying something about categories A, B and C, and that they suspected he'd looked at all three. I had no idea what any of it meant. When she said category A involved penetration of minors, I wanted to throw up."

Much of that evening is a blur for Emma, but one thing comes back to her "with the intensity of a flashback". The female officer told her: "Don't even tell close friends or family about this. There might be vigilante behaviour such as spray-painting your property." Emma remembers this because it was the same advice she was given during her one and only conversation with social services after Ben's arrest, when she was told: "Do not tell people. Your children might find they aren't invited to playdates any more. Other mothers may question whether their children were safe under your care."

After the police left, Emma, in a state of shock, put her children to bed. "I told them that police officers have to practise searching people's houses and that's what they were doing in our house. They were young enough that they were just happy to have been allowed to watch so much TV at bedtime."

Once they were asleep, the panic hit. "I had the search warrant in front of me and I realised I couldn't describe any of the officers or remember their names. I freaked out and told myself I had just been robbed. I called my local police station and said, 'Does this officer exist?' I'll never forget the tone of the woman's voice, as if I were an idiot for asking, when she said, 'Yeah, he's a police officer.' I felt so stupid. But at that moment, the concept that my ex-husband had looked at child abuse images, and the concept that I had just been robbed – both were equally surreal."

Families who have been through this experience call it "the knock": the moment when police officers arrive at your door and your world falls apart. Around 850 people, mainly men, are arrested each month in England and Wales for downloading indecent images or grooming children online. In 2010 there were only 407 arrests across the entire year; since then there has

been a staggering 25-fold rise that threatens to [overwhelm UK police capacity](#).

One reason for this is the ease of accessing abusive material. Earlier this year, [Rob Jones](#), director of threat leadership at the National Crime Agency, warned: “The prevalence on the open web of images of child sexual abuse – and the use of the web to groom and livestream abuse – represents a crisis for modern society.”

Most images are not on the dark web but “a few clicks away”, Jones says. According to police figures, their UK database of known child abuse images has 17m unique entries on it, and it is growing by 500,000 images every two months. New patterns of grooming have emerged over the last decade, particularly children being targeted via chat sites or livestreaming services, often in their own bedrooms. They are tricked into sending images of themselves, which are then used to blackmail them and further the abuse.

Michael Sheath is a counsellor at the [Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#), a group that works to rehabilitate offenders. He believes that for some people, watching abuse-themed pornography, which is increasingly widespread, [makes it easier for them to take the next step of watching real abuse of children](#). “There is a school of thought that some men were already interested in children and went off to look for it – that they are born paedophiles. But I think a lot of the men we work with go down a potentially escalating pathway.

This was not on my radar at all. The passwords on his computers, the time spent online – I thought he was having an affair

Mainstream pornography sites are changing the threshold of what is normal and I think it’s dangerous. Of course most people can watch extreme porn and walk away, but I don’t see those people. What we are seeing on a daily basis is the conflation of easy access to hardcore and deviant pornography, and an interest in child molestation. The link is unambiguous.”

Rachel Armitage, professor of criminology at the University of Huddersfield, has studied the experiences of non-offending partners of men

arrested for online child abuse crimes. Based on her research into “the knock”, Armitage says: “We believe there are around 300 families with children going through it each month in England and Wales. That’s 10 every day.”

The knock is a uniquely awful experience, hitting every unsuspecting family differently, but a pattern is discernible. A sudden arrest, a husband or father removed, phones and devices taken away for evidence, little information given about the nature or scale of the crime, and then silence. A mother is left to comfort her children and is often advised to conceal the truth for the sake of her family.

Charities such as [Acts Fast](#), originally set up for the families of victims of abuse, have evolved to help the partners and children of offenders, having identified a massive need for support where there was none.

Emily Cursley, therapeutic sessional worker at Acts Fast, says police asked them to step in to support a [specialist investigations team from Dorset](#). “We get on average three referrals a week (to help offenders’ families), that’s just locally. And we have noticed a significant increase over the past 18 months in families who need our support. But we really struggle to get funding because, both societally and legally, we don’t class these children as victims - yet of course they are.”

After his arrest, Ben was released on bail overnight. Emma woke up to a message saying “sorry”. When she called him, “he was so ashamed”. He said he had been watching porn more often because he was depressed about their divorce, and “a couple of times I clicked on things that might have been a bit dodgy”.

Emma and Ben married after meeting on a night out. “I thought he was funny and kind. Like me, he liked the outdoors.” The relationship fell apart, in ordinary ways, after their children came along. “I divorced him for many reasons – mainly because he was a lazy father and went out drinking too much – but this was not on my radar at all. All the passwords on his computers, the time spent online. I added two and two together and thought, ‘Ah, you’re having an affair.’”

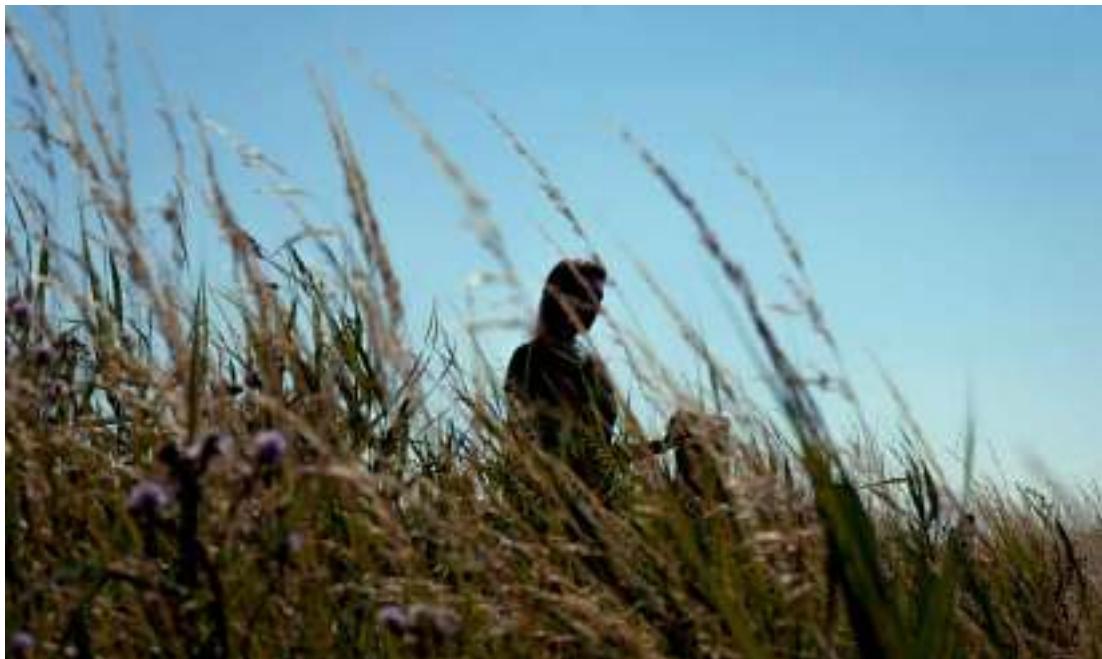
Emma knew he watched porn but didn't see it as a red flag: "It was just something he did." When she heard Ben's description of "things that were a bit dodgy", she thought "they might find about 20 images. I was thinking he was looking at teenagers. Maybe 16-year-old girls." He'd said, "I wasn't searching for these things, I just went down a dark alley. Click, click, click."

She recalls the police telling her they couldn't reveal the full details of what Ben would be charged with until they were read out in court, and warned her that he might do something drastic in response to his arrest. "I felt they wanted me to keep quiet about what was happening, so he wouldn't kill himself. And he was a risk, he was so ashamed. He was a professional, our children went to the local school."

Within days, social services visited – for the only time – to assess the welfare of the children. They concluded that they hadn't been abused and told Emma that Ben could have only supervised access to them. "Of course I was conflicted," she says of the suggestion that he should be given access. "But I still didn't have all the facts about what he'd done."

She agreed to let her children see him a few hours a week as long as she was present throughout. "I didn't want to stop him seeing them completely. He's their dad, they love their dad."

It was only when Ben went to court, months later, that she discovered the full extent of the allegations: "He had been looking at child abuse from when I was pregnant with our youngest child up until the day he was arrested. Years. It was in the most serious category, and he had viewed over 1,000 images." The police told Emma to expect a prison sentence. But Ben, who pleaded guilty, received a suspended sentence and was placed on the sex offender register.



‘I felt like the world dropped away,’ Emma says of the evening police officers arrived to inform her of her ex-husband’s arrest. Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian

Before his case even came to court, Emma fled to a new town. Motivated by fear that her children would suffer if their friends and neighbours found out about what Ben had done, she moved to a place where she knew no one. “What if my children were bullied? Other mothers would wonder if their children had been safe in my home, and why I hadn’t known what he was doing,” she says.

But starting again has presented its own challenges. “I started off by saying I’d had a difficult divorce and wanted a fresh start. But when friendships deepened, I couldn’t explain why the kids could see their dad for only a few hours, or why I couldn’t leave them with him if I was invited on girly weekends. It got awkward.” Her life now, she says, is like “witness protection without the protection”.

Armitage’s research found that, of 150 family members who have been through the knock, about 69% have severe PTSD. The emotional fallout is often exacerbated by the isolation and lack of support that follows. “Their phones have been taken, so they are unable to contact anyone for help, and

in just a few hours, for some, they have become a single parent,” Armitage says. “They are in total shock, but they are told not to talk about it.”

Some women find each other on internet forums, where they offer comfort and support under pseudonyms. One describes processing her partner’s arrest as like a bereavement without the body, grieving for the loss of a life they had before “this nightmare”. Another apologises for welcoming her to “a club no one wants to be in”. But for others, the internet becomes a place to fear. One woman told Armitage, “You are left reliant on finding your own information. It is such an uncertain time. I didn’t even dare go online to look for help.”

Another said: “My daughter was here at the time of the knock and that was horrendous. She was crying, she was making noises like a wounded animal. There were no pleasantries. The police just said, ‘Right, what devices have you got?’ That sort of thing. My daughter was being sick and there was no recognition of, ‘My God, this is so difficult for you.’”

I was so shocked. It was as if I had lost my brother but worse. Every little memory of him was now tainted

DCI Michael Ford is a senior officer with South Wales police who has been involved in hundreds of child abuse arrests, from viewing uploaded images to trying to contact children online. “With their phones, people can access material that previously would have been difficult to find. You are only a few clicks away from the most abhorrent material,” he says. He has seen people from all walks of life: “Bus drivers, barristers, doctors, police officers. I’ve done hundreds of these arrests and they are extremely distressing.”

He says it is the ordinariness of the family that makes this process such a shock for partners. “Often, families have not had contact with the police before, so there is no belligerence. They are usually totally shocked. But mums cooperate immediately – they want to do what’s best for the kids. We do what we can to ensure distress is minimal, but you can see the impact is devastating.”

Where there are children, there are safeguarding issues. “They do see Dad taken away. We try to ensure social services see them as soon as possible.” And he tries to tell mothers what offences they are looking at: “You have to balance the privacy of the offender against the partner being aware of the risk he poses. If the person is looking at kids the same age as their own kids, the mother does need to know that.”

Ford has helped create a family pack with numbers mothers can call, from Samaritans to specialist groups such as [Stop It Now](#). “It’s damage limitation. They are in such shock when we are there – they aren’t taking information in. We hope one day to have a pack especially for children. We talk about adverse childhood experiences – well, our arrival can trigger so many: incarceration of a parent, divorce, trauma, potentially a parent’s suicide. We are acutely aware of the devastation we are leaving behind.”

Darcey was at home with her children one Friday afternoon when she found out her older brother, Ed, had been arrested. Then she took a call from a social worker, who said: “Your brother has been arrested for looking at online child abuse and we are seeking assurance that your children will never see him again.” Darcey recalls, “They were that abrupt. I was so shocked that to this day I can’t remember if it was a man or a woman who spoke to me.”

The social worker asked if her brother had ever had unsupervised contact with her children. When she said he hadn’t, “that was it, it was a tick-box exercise in safeguarding. They didn’t point me to anything in terms of help or advice, absolutely nothing.” Darcey went to bed for three days. “My husband said, ‘It’s like you are grieving for your brother.’ It was as if I had lost him but worse. Every little memory I had of him was now tarnished.”

Ed had viewed images in all three categories, including young children being abused. “He was disgusted with himself – he said he had viewed too much extreme material and lost empathy. He felt deep loathing and shame.”

The siblings had been close their whole life. “He was such a sensitive child,” she says. But she no longer invites Ed into her home and he has not seen her

children since his arrest. He has stopped drinking now and had counselling. Darcey believes he deserves a second chance, but acknowledges it will take a long time to rebuild the trust that has been broken.

Once a month, she supervises Ed's contact with his young son. "I cried after the first visit. They only had one hour together, and my nephew started eating slowly just to get more time with his dad. One baked bean at a time."

Years later, Darcey still feels the echoes of isolation, loss, betrayal, fear and stigma that followed her brother's arrest. But there is also love, and with it a great sadness. She is scathing about social services. After his arrest, she says, "We had to ask to meet the social worker to make sure we were doing everything right, and we only met her once in two years. Nobody has ever checked that we were properly supervising his contact. I was making decisions about safeguarding with my heart, not with professional advice."

No one in authority spoke to my children beyond one visit. The boxes were ticked immediately after their father's arrest

For her, "the dilemma of not knowing what to do for the best" continues. Darcey asked social services for advice about what happens next, and whether she should still supervise visits with her nephew now Ed is no longer on the sex offender register, but she says there was "a lack of clear advice. They drop a bombshell, then walk away – they give you no support whatsoever." The Department for Education, which oversees social care for children in England, says, "Nothing is more important than the safety of children. Local authorities have a duty to safeguard their welfare and should identify emerging problems and unmet needs to decide what early help services are required. Where existing support and interventions do not work, the local authority should act decisively to protect the child from abuse or neglect."

One of the problems for families is assessing the risk these men pose to their own children. A scan through the hundreds of local news reports finds common mitigating pleas: depression and addiction to porn are the most commonly cited.

In 2019, only 20% of offenders convicted of accessing indecent images of children were given a custodial sentence – both Ben and Ed had been looking at child abuse for years but neither went to jail – and this low rate leaves men living in communities while families have to work out for themselves how to behave around them.

Armitage says women are being put in an invidious position. “A partner is asked to make this decision about future contact while experiencing trauma and under social and financial pressure because the man may lose his job and he has to move out. For many women it isn’t clearcut. For example, you may be told by your partner that there ‘might’ be ‘some’ images. Depending on the circumstances of the investigation, this may not be fully disclosed until court – which could be a year at the very least.

The women I have spoken with predominantly say that they feel guilt for even considering that they should be seeking support. They say the children being abused are the real victims and they don’t feel that their pain even deserves acknowledging.”

Deputy chief constable Ian Critchley has taken on the role of lead for child protection at the National Police Chiefs’ Council, speaking for forces across the country on the issue. He has decades of experience working on serious crime, including child exploitation and domestic violence. “We have seen the explosion of the internet which allows men to groom and exploit children, to commit horrendous criminal acts. At the end of this, at the heart of everything we do, there is a real child with a basic human right to thrive in society. I don’t see a distinction between abusing children and watching that abuse,” he says. “We are working hard with local authorities, with experts, to think about the care needed for children of offenders. But let’s be clear: the onus is on the dad, the trusted parent who commits this appalling crime.”

Emma, meanwhile, has thrown herself into campaigning to raise awareness of the lack of support for children like her own. Last month, she delivered a presentation to the police on how better safeguarding needs to be put in place when the knock happens, using her own experiences to bring to life the trauma that follows. She wants families to have an advocate within police or

social services who can guide them through the court process and the difficult decisions about access.

She points to [Operation Encompass](#), which supports children who experience domestic violence by connecting police to schools and early years service providers, as a model for handling these arrests.

“I think the fact that my children had a father on the sex offender register for several years, and no one in authority spoke to them or monitored them beyond one initial visit, is just staggering. My children were forgotten; the boxes relating to them were ticked immediately after the arrest.”

Her most serious concern is that a child will one day be abused by a father whose contact was not properly monitored. “Think about how widespread child abuse is; it is only a matter of time before a child is abused by a father on the sex offender register, and I don’t say that lightly.”

Her own children still see their father only under supervision. Now that they are older, Emma has begun to tell them what their dad has done. “I had to tell them not to tell anyone, I had to bring them into a circle of secrecy and shame. But the fact is, people they know will find out – and they will have a lifetime of dealing with the fallout.”

Some names and details have been changed.

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. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.

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[Blind date](#)[Dating](#)

Blind date: ‘He kept name-dropping celebrities he’s worked with’

Will, 27, A&E doctor, meets Owen, 26, stage manager



‘He was ridiculously handsome’: Will (left) and Owen. Photograph: Sophia Evans/The Guardian

‘He was ridiculously handsome’: Will (left) and Owen. Photograph: Sophia Evans/The Guardian

Sat 31 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Will on Owen

What were you hoping for?

To meet the love of my life, or at least go viral.

First impressions?

Very straight teeth.

What did you talk about?

Ballet dancers, bad dates and Bimini Bon-Boulash.

Any awkward moments?

He kept name-dropping celebrities he's worked with and told me not to mention it here.

Good table manners?

I was a whole hour late, so I really don't think I can comment on manners.

Best thing about Owen?

His fresh fade – he must have had his hair cut that day.

Would you introduce him to your friends?

Probably, but they'd eat him alive. They are awful.

Describe Owen in three words

Funny, nerdy, handsome.

What do you think he made of you?

He said he liked my jacket, which is a win in my eyes.

Did you go on somewhere?

Alas, we left at closing time but he walked me to the station.

If it weren't for social distancing, would you have kissed?

...

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

I would have arrived earlier, so we had time for a nightcap.

Marks out of 10?

6.5.

Would you meet again?

Probably as pals.

Q&A

Want to be in Blind date?

Show

Blind date is Guardian Weekend magazine's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Guardian Weekend magazine (in the UK) and online at theguardian.com every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

What questions will I be asked?

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

Can I choose who I match with?

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

Can I pick the photograph?

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

What personal details will appear?

Your first name, job and age.

How should I answer?

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

Will I see the other person's answers?

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

Will you find me The One?
We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

Can I do it in my home town?

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

How to apply

Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Owen on Will

What were you hoping for?

I was just looking to do something fun and different. And if the food was good and the company nice, then that would be a plus.

First impressions?

Ridiculously handsome. He brought me flowers, which was so kind. I was also very impressed by/jealous of his hair.

What did you talk about?

We had a good ramble about drag queens, which turned into a nice conversation about gender politics/identity. We spoke about our jobs, and our drastically different experiences of the last year.

Any awkward moments?

Nothing really stood out.

Good table manners?

Totally fine. We had a laugh about how we could totally embarrass each other with this question.

Best thing about Will?

His confidence and self-expression. He's very easy to listen to and is a great storyteller.

[Blind date: ‘He is very, very different from my friends’](#)

[Read more](#)

Would you introduce him to your friends?

For sure.

Describe Will in three words

Intelligent, kind, handsome.

What do you think he made of you?

I hope he thought I was nice and friendly. He probably thought I was a bit silly/goofy.

Did you go on somewhere?

He had quite a long trip home, so I walked him to the station.

If it weren’t for social distancing, would you have kissed?

Maybe...

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

I would have bought him flowers, too!

Marks out of 10?

8.

Would you meet again?

I don’t think there was really a romantic connection, but he’s a great guy and certainly someone I could spend more time with.

Will and Owen ate at [Grand Trunk Road](#), London E18

Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

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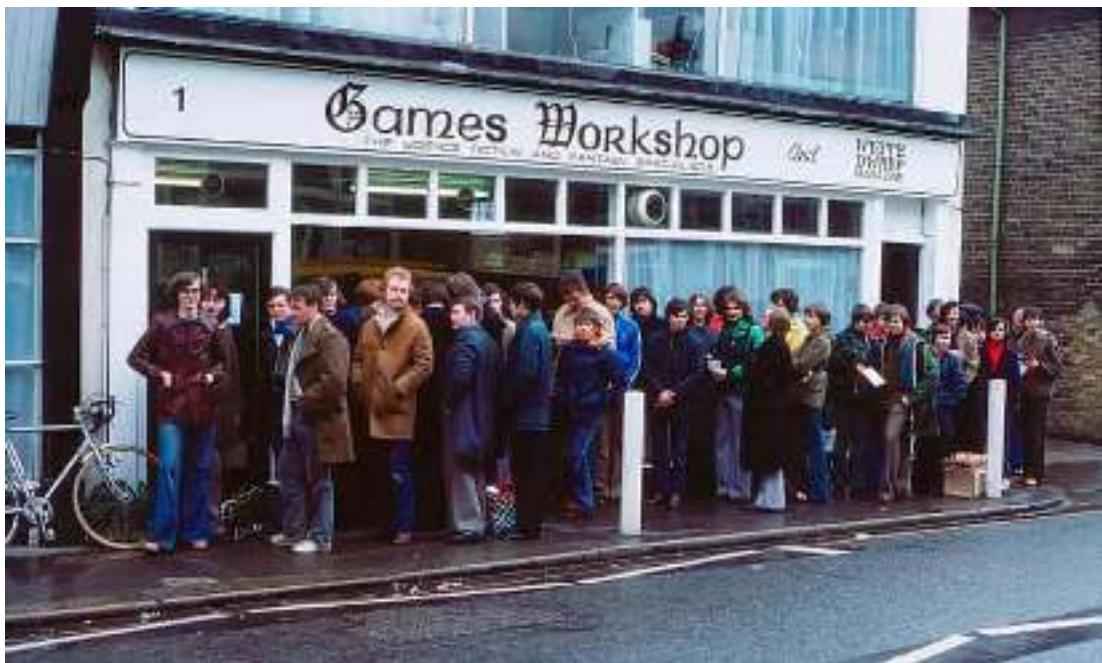
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Board games

How Games Workshop grew to become more profitable than Google



Opening day queue of the first Games Workshop in Hammersmith in April 1978
Photograph: Ian Livingstone

Opening day queue of the first Games Workshop in Hammersmith in April 1978
Photograph: Ian Livingstone

Tabletop gaming, based on a mix of science fiction and fantasy worlds, has seen sales surge during lockdown



[Sarah Butler](#)

[@whatbutlersaw](#)

Sat 31 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

It started in a small flat in west London, with three friends selling board games and a fanzine via mail order; now Games Workshop is worth more than Marks & Spencer and Asos and is more profitable than Google.

This week the Nottingham-based company, which produces the Warhammer fantasy role-playing brand, announced [all of its workers would get a £5,000 bonus](#) after sales and profits surged during the pandemic.

Run by Kevin Rountree, a former accountant who shuns the press, the firm counts Ed Sheeran, the Fast & Furious actor Vin Diesel and Superman among its legion of fans – the British actor Henry Cavill, who plays the comic book hero on screen, revealed his love of Warhammer in an Instagram post during lockdown last year, in which he confessed to an addiction to collecting Games Workshop's tiny figurines, describing them as “plastic crack”.

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The company was founded more than four decades ago when friends John Peake, [Ian Livingstone](#) and Steve Jackson began making their own wooden board games and creating a gaming newsletter. They found their feet when the American creator of Dungeons & Dragons asked them to become the role playing game's first UK distributor.

The first Games Workshop store opened in Hammersmith in 1978 and began producing miniature wargaming models before, in 1983, creating Warhammer, which stages bloodthirsty battles between orcs and elves.

From those updated toy "soldiers" based on a mix of science-fiction and the fantasy world of elves and orcs, Warhammer is now a global brand behind books, video games, a magazine, animations and a planned TV show. The company has 523 shops worldwide, where fans can learn to create and paint models, or play the game.

Collectors build large forces of miniature plastic gaming models, which can cost more than £100 each. A miniature can be made up of hundreds of pieces which must be fitted together and then painted with colours such as "flesh" and "bone".



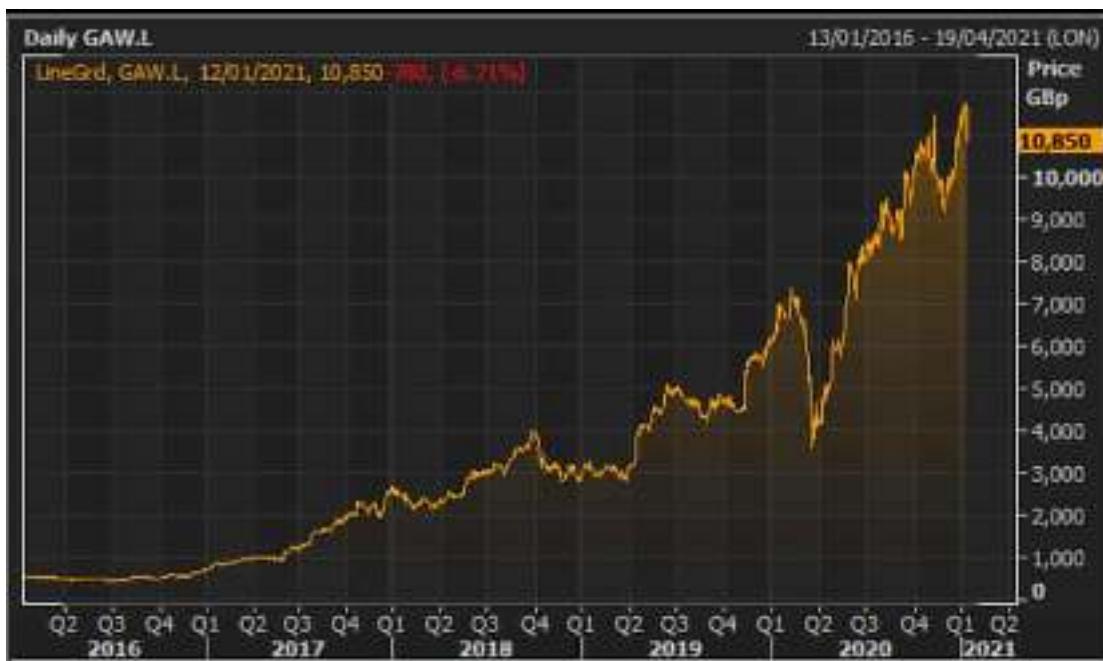
A customer uses a tape measure to play Warhammer in a London Games Workshop store in London. Photograph: Alamy

This can be used to play out clashes on a tabletop battlefield at home or at events, although some fans never play and instead compete to show off their creative versions of the models.

The long history of the game “lore” is another source of income with books, a magazine and online content keeping fans informed. The group is working to develop Eisenhorn, a live-action science-fiction and fantasy television series with Frank Spotnitz, the American producer of The X Files.

The latest accounts show that last year the company made sales of £361m and an operating profit margin of 43%, higher than Google owner Alphabet Group’s margin of about 25%.

Designing, making and selling the vast majority of its products in-house means that the group doesn’t need to hand a cut of profits to third parties such as factory owners or retailers.



Games Workshop's share price. Photograph: Refinitiv

In recent weeks, news of the company's success has prompted some former workers to raise concerns about low pay for the army of creatives who devise the games and design new miniatures. Those complaining of their treatment all appear to have moved on several years ago, and the company now regularly pays profit bonuses and offers a share save scheme to ordinary staff.

Livingstone, who has just written a book on its early years, says the success of Warhammer is its "metaverse" – a world in which fans can become completely immersed.

Games Workshop's White Dwarf magazine, which was originally started to write about the role-playing games the founders loved, turned out to be a stroke of genius, helping to create demand from a loyal fanbase.

"Traditionally simplistic toy soldiers became a hobby. You can always buy something whether it is a miniature, a tin of paint or a rulebook," he says.

Livingstone, who sold his stake in Games Workshop back in 1991 and is now chairman of the British video game developer Sumo Group, says the group has also benefited from a rise in geek culture, partly prompted by the success of tech-entrepreneurs behind the likes of Google and Facebook. The

internet has also made it easier for potential fans of the complex games to find each other and learn about how to play.

The worldwide tabletop games sector that Warhammer is part of will be worth \$12bn (£8.6bn) by 2023, up from \$7.2bn in 2017, according to the consumer data firm Statista, with new entrants able to raise funds from enthusiasts through platforms such as Kickstarter.

At least 10,000 gaming fans are expected to descend on Birmingham's NEC conference centre this weekend for the first UK Games Expo in two years and more than 200 exhibitors will show off their games.

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Kate Evans, from Games Expo, says: "We are seeing more and more families each year coming along. People are looking for a quality time with more for your money and more social, with people talking to each other."

In recent years, interest in tabletop gaming has been fuelled not only by more interest in home-based activities during the pandemic, but also by the Netflix drama Stranger Things, where the characters are fans of Dungeons & Dragons, and by YouTube shows such as Tabletop, fronted by Wil Wheaton.

"We used to be told we were geeks, nerds or anoraks to be looked down on. Now it's become pretty cool," says Livingstone. "There is a huge resurgence in board games. People enjoy social fun and communicating with people while stabbing each other in the back."

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Music

Interview

Billie Eilish: ‘To always try to look good is such a loss of joy and freedom’

[Miranda Sawyer](#)



Billie Eilish: ‘Why do we care about bodies at all? Why do we care about hair?’ Photograph: Lillie Eiger/The Guardian

Billie Eilish: ‘Why do we care about bodies at all? Why do we care about hair?’ Photograph: Lillie Eiger/The Guardian

In an exclusive interview, Gen Z’s biggest pop star talks about body image, oversharing with fans and what she’s missed most since becoming famous



[@msmirandasawyer](#)

Sat 31 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Billie Eilish is making me nervous. She has called, as arranged, bang on time – 11pm in Los Angeles – but, she admits, she is not quite ready to speak: “This is a mess, I’m so sorry!” Her pale face and platinum hair loom from her phone screen, surrounded by darkness. Her head is at a funny angle and... oh God, she’s *driving*, her mobile apparently balanced on the car’s dashboard.

Help! I don’t want to inadvertently cause the death of one of the world’s most gifted and valuable pop stars; to watch as a generation-defining musician at the top of her game crashes her car.

“Girl, crashing is not me! I am not that person,” Eilish says, half-laughing, half-stressed. “I went to my brother’s house for a swim and to check on his dogs, because he’s away, and now I’m driving to my parents’ house, I promise it’s really close.”

OK, I say, still jumpy. But what’s that beeping sound?

“It’s my dog – he’s sleeping on the other seat and he’s 70 pounds, so he’s making the car beep because he doesn’t have a seatbelt on. I have mine on,

look,” she says, showing me. “The beeping is really perfect for this call, isn’t it? And now the car wants to Bluetooth my phone. This is *great*,” she says, almost to herself, her sarcasm instantly familiar to any parent of a teenager.



Photograph: Lillie Eiger/The Guardian. Tops: [Margiela](#) and vintage [JPG](#). Jeans: [Masha Popova](#). Shoes: custom [Agent 33](#). Rings: [Loren Stewart](#) and [Mejuri](#)

Such bombastic attitude is forgivable, because Eilish *is* a teenager, albeit one of the most famous in the world. She’s 19 now, a music veteran of six years, ever since she made a track, Ocean Eyes, with her songwriter elder brother, Finneas O’Connell, known professionally as Finneas, for her dance class. She uploaded it on to SoundCloud, where it gained a couple of thousand listens and almost instantaneously landed her a management deal. At her early gigs she had to sit outside on the pavement before shows, not allowed in because she was underage. But within a few months, something happened: in 2017, her EP Don’t Smile At Me made a splash with young fans, and a year or so later Wish You Were Gay and Bad Guy smashed her into the mainstream. Eilish’s intimate, breathy vocals over the driving beat, her eye-rolling, nose-bleeding, blue-haired look in the video, and the flip of the lyrics (“I’m that bad type... might-seduce-your-dad type”) took her stratospheric. (“Duh,” she sang.) She was 17.

Her first album, *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*, released in 2019, went multi-platinum and landed her five Grammys; she picked up another two, this year, for her theme for the still-awaited Bond film *No Time To Die* and her single *Everything I Wanted*. She'd done three dates of a massive world tour when lockdown arrived, so she and Finneas used the time to write another album.



With her brother, Finneas O'Connell, at the American Music Awards 2020.
Photograph: ABC/Shutterstock

"It's not a Covid album, but it was the first time in four, five years that we had time off to actually make songs, without anybody telling us to, or any deadlines, or any pressure. It was great because I don't write fast," Eilish says. Her voice is deeper than you might expect. "We were so in the mindset, I loved it." She's pulled over, to get her dog (Shark, a pitbull) to lie on the car floor. As she talks, she holds her phone up at random angles; no standard video-call etiquette here – her phone is an accessory, a witness to her life. "Ask me questions!" she says, as she organises herself. Within a few seconds, she's driving again. "My parents' house is literally five minutes away!" she hoots.

Billie Eilish Pirate Baird O'Connell is full-on, in all senses. After a rocket-powered zoom from cool indie artist to massive global fame, her second

album, Happier Than Ever, is coming out and she's working hard to promote it. Everyone wants her, from the press to her fans (88 million on Instagram); she recently [admitted to having crying jags](#) over the number of photoshoots she's had to do. She is huge across the world; her every move, official or papped, is clickbait. Her devotees span all ages, but she has an especially besotted young fanbase. She has said that her fans are why she does what she does – “I wouldn’t want to do any of this if they weren’t involved,” she tells me – but they also analyse her every move, flipping between worship and informing her where she’s gone wrong.



Photograph: Lillie Eiger/The Guardian. Vintage Tu Pac shirt: courtesy of [Saint Luis NYC](#). Necklace: [The Last Line](#)

Recent gripes include her choice of boyfriends – her ex, rapper Brandon “Q” Adams, [wasn’t nice enough to her](#); her supposed current boyfriend, actor Matthew Tyler Vorce, used racist and homophobic language in the past – but also: aged 13, she once sang along with a racial slur in a Tyler, the Creator lyric (she’s apologised, saying she had no idea what it meant at the time; plus, no heat for Tyler, you notice); her video for recent single Lost Cause, in which she appears to be having a fun sleepover with other young women, is “queer-baiting”, because she is straight. Cancel culture, where one misstep can send you to societal Siberia, seems impossible for anyone to navigate, but especially so when you’re young, famous and doing your growing up

online. “Uuuugh,” she says of online trolls. “These people don’t do anything. I’m like, do something with your life! Go somewhere. Go get a hobby.”

Lost Cause, with its all-together merriment, is a bit of a departure for Eilish, who has long presented herself, at least in videos, as an outsider. Nonconformity is her appeal: her music uses experimental production, she hides her soulful voice by singing close to the mic or using Auto-Tune. Her lyrics reveal the teenage life pop usually ignores: not just the intensity of its romantic love, but also its strange fears and stupid jokes; its revenge fantasies, ineffable sadness, loopy drama and life-death obsessions. In her lonely videos, she floats like she’s possessed; cries black tears; has cigarettes stubbed on to her cheeks. In photos, she stares into the camera with a hood-eyed, eff-you stare. [She has Tourette’s](#), and when she’s stressed, she tics, her head flicking, her eyes pulling wide, as if she wants to expel something crawling in her brain.



With Finneas and their Grammys in March. Photograph: Kevin Mazur/Getty Images for The Recording Academy

Teenage girls, as an audience, have been targeted by adults ever since pop was invented. Eilish has shown that they’re a lot weirder, cooler and on it than the grownups ever credited, by detailing the switchback moods and

defiant peculiarity of contemporary teenage life. But she's becoming an adult now. Can her fans allow her to evolve?

To my relief, Eilish is now parking the car in her parents' yard: "The entrance is so small and my car is such a tank." I know her car is a black Dodge Challenger, given to her on her 17th birthday by her record company. And I also know her parents' house is a scruffy, detached bungalow, packed with the detritus of long-term family living. I know these things because Eilish enjoys her life being documented – via home videos when she was young and recently in [a book of photos from her childhood to now](#) – though there are limits, as she will tell me.

She bustles through the house, calling "hello" to her parents, plonks down on a bed and leans the phone against something. After a while, I realise it's a mirror, because she starts brushing her fringe.

Although we start by talking about her album's themes – there are two, broadly: one is a fuck you to an old flame, the other calls people out for the way they treat young women – we soon start discussing body image. Eilish loves to play with fashion and changes her style all the time – she remembers making the deliberate decision, aged four or five, to go out with her knickers on top of her trousers – but tries hard not to be overly concerned with her looks.

Some people are so insecure, they never move in a weird way, or make a weird face. It makes me so sad

For a long while, her aesthetic references combined the gothic (coloured hair, pet spiders, the Babadook) with hip-hop (baggy shorts, hoodies, Louis Vuitton), culminating in her dyeing her hair black with neon green roots, sporting claw-like nails, neon green top and shorts.

Her new look is less cartoonish, though it still seems a little dress-up: Marilyn Monroe blond hair; soft beige and pink clothes; references to 1930s Hollywood and French boudoir. As it's Eilish, there's a twist (big trainers, over-the-knee socks, a huge new tattoo of a dragon across her lower hip). She launched this style in British Vogue in May, where she stared from the

cover, defiant in a corset, instantly confounding those who previously lauded her for covering herself up. Today, beneath that glamorous platinum fringe, she's rocking a baggy Eazy-E T-shirt.



With Finneas at iHeartRadio ALTer EGO 2021. Photograph: Kevin Mazur/Getty Images for iHeartMedia

“Since I was a kid,” she says, “my dad and I have always talked about a certain type of person who’s so insecure, or hyperaware and self-conscious, that they never move in a weird way, or make a weird face, because they always want to look good. I’ve noticed that, and it makes me so sad. If you’re always standing a certain way, walking in a certain way, and always have your hair just so... It’s such a loss to always try to always look good. It’s such a loss of joy and freedom in your body.”

This loss of freedom is more likely, of course, if you’re a young woman. Eilish recently released *Not My Responsibility*, which is on the new album: a spoken-word piece that questions why her physique is seen by others as provocative, no matter whether she covers herself up, or doesn’t. *“The body I was born with, is it not what you wanted? If I wear what is comfortable, I am not a woman. If I shed the layers, I’m a slut.”* And in *Your Power*, a song about older men preying on young women, a punch-to-the-gut lyric hidden in the prettiest of tunes, she talks about the terrible ways that those who are

“provoked” by such young women can act. “*You ruined her in a year, don’t act like it was hard... She was sleeping in your clothes... now she’s got to get to class.*” “It’s an open letter,” she says, “a general statement. I had multiple people I was thinking about in that song, which is sad, I know. But it’s not all about one person. Some lines have nothing to do with me, they’re just things I’ve seen, or things my friends have gone through.”



Photograph: Lillie Eiger/The Guardian. Top: [Stella McCartney](#). Ring: [Harlot Hands](#). Earrings: vintage

Another song on the album has a similar call-out theme: “OverHeated applies to all the people who promote unattainable body standards,” she says. “It’s completely fine to get work done – do this, do that, do what makes you feel happy. It’s just when you deny it and say, ‘Oh, I got this all on my own, and if you just tried harder, you could get it.’ That makes me literally furious. It is so bad for young women – and boys, too – to see that.”

She knows from experience of the music industry that most perfect Insta-friendly images are unreal. But it still affects her. “I see people online, looking like I’ve never looked,” she says. “And immediately I am like, oh my God, how do they look like that? I know the ins and outs of this industry, and what people actually use in photos, and I actually know what looks real can be fake. Yet I still see it and go, oh God, that makes me feel really bad.

And I mean, I'm very confident in who I am, and I'm very happy with my life... I'm obviously not happy with my body”, she adds casually, “but who is?”

On stage, I disassociate from the ideas I have of my body. Then a paparazzi picture is taken and everyone's like ‘Fat!’

She picks up a small jade roller and runs it over her cheek as she speaks. I'm taken aback that she's “obviously” not happy with her body, but Eilish is nothing if not honest; she responds in the moment. And actually, despite her enormous social media presence, she can often seem like she's in disguise. Her style is so distinctive, it has become a camouflage. (You can order her green and black look as a costume online; several of her friends, and her mum, dressed up as Eilish for Halloween 2019; Eilish herself dressed as a ghost.)

She used to be a dancer, and imagined that would be her career, until she suffered a serious hip injury, aged 13. We talk about how dancing makes you feel, its exhilaration. She used to love jumping in mosh pits, “the freedom and independence”, though she hasn't managed to do so since 2016. “Even though there's many people around you in a mosh pit, you're alone. Nobody knows who you are. That's what I really loved. I miss mosh pits.” Before her gigs got really big, she was proud of creating mosh pits in them – “I once created seven!” – but some of her fans were too young and didn't know what to do.



Young Billie. Photograph: the family of Billie Eilish, taken from Billie Eilish by Billie Eilish, out in hardback and audio now (Wren & Rook)

She still connects with that physical wildness, usually when she's on stage – though she has to push away negative thoughts in order to do so. "When I'm on stage, I have to disassociate from the ideas I have of my body," she says. "Especially because I wear clothes that are bigger and easier to move in without showing everything – they can be really unflattering. In pictures, they look like I don't even know what. I just completely separate the two. Because I have such a terrible relationship with my body, like you would not believe, so I just have to disassociate... Then you get a paparazzi picture taken when you were running to the door and had just put anything on, and didn't know the picture's being taken, and you just look how you look, and everyone's like, 'Fat!'"

How weird, I say, to have your body dissected in such a way.

"Yes! I mean, we only need bodies to eat and walk around and poop. We only need them to survive. It's ridiculous that anybody even cares about bodies at all. Like, why? Why do we care? You know, when you really think about it?"

She smooths her fringe. “Why do we care about hair? Why does everybody hate body hair so much, but we literally have an enormous thing of hair on our heads, and that’s, like, cool and pretty. Like, what’s the difference? I mean, I love hair, and I do crazy things with my hair. I’m as guilty as everybody else. But it’s so weird. If you think about it hard, you go crazy.”

Eilish does think hard, and is involved in all the visual presentation of her work. She directs her own videos, and thinks filmically: both she and Finneas have a form of synesthesia, and she sees images when she makes music. I ask her about a new song called Oxytocin, which reminds me of dark clubs at 3am. What colour does she see when she sings it?



At Radio 1's Big Weekend in 2019. Photograph: Jo Hale/Redferns

“There was flashing in my head when we made that,” Eilish says, thoughtfully rolling the jade across her neck. “The colour of whatever was in my brain while making it was dark, but also a flashing yellow.” She pauses. “Honestly, the images I have for Oxytocin were just sex. That’s it. All different kinds, and styles, and colours, and locations. That’s really what was in my head. Sex.”

She has another think. “Which means that whenever I sing it on stage, I have to think about sex,” she says, and grins. “I have no problem with that.”

Eilish talks completely on the level; not deliberately provocative, but unvarnished and straight. She was home schooled and has always had the quality, common to many home-schooled children, of being on a par with adults. She expects respect because she's always been given it at home.

Her parents, Patrick O'Connell and Maggie Baird, both part-time actors (O'Connell was in Iron Man and The West Wing; Baird, The X-Files and Bones), are massively important in her life; they've had to be, as up until December 2019, she required a guardian in order to have a career. Whenever they're interviewed, they come across as sane and loving, and have created a team around their daughter that lets her, mostly, be who she is, and express herself as she wishes. Eilish's now-privileged position doesn't stop her from suffering the traumas of contemporary young life – she's suffered from depression and used to cut herself – but she's able to talk about her feelings without venom. "I try really, really hard to be pleasant to work with," she says. "Sometimes people are huge idiots, and you have to be like, 'Hey, you're being an idiot.' But I never throw things or yell at anybody, ever. I love working with people."

Eilish is naturally very social; she chose rapper Denzel Curry as her support act because they get on so well. And though she lost quite a few pals when she became famous, she has a couple who have stuck with her throughout: Drew she met aged nine; Zoe when they were three. Zoe came with her on her last tour, Drew gets a namecheck in a song on the new album. Fame has meant Eilish's life has had to change, though she fights to keep some aspects the same. She now has her own place, but still likes to sleep at her parents' house.



‘I try really, really hard to be pleasant to work with. I never throw things or yell.’ Photograph: Lillie Eiger/The Guardian

“I really don’t like to be alone,” she says. “I do like having anonymity, or autonomy, but I really am flipped out when I’m alone. I hate it. I have a lot of stalkers,” she says, matter of factly, “and I have people that want to do bad things to me, and I also am freaked out by the dark and, like, what’s under beds and couches. I have a lot of weird, irrational fears. So I’m still at my parents’ house a lot. I just love my parents and really like it here. It’s very comforting.”

Eilish thinks she is most like her dad – “we’re the same person” – a gentle, warm man who can turn his hand to anything practical (he made the large red A-frame for the artwork for her Don’t Smile At Me EP) and is now a carpenter and lighting director on her tour. “Our personalities are just very similar, and we have similar body language, and also the way we talk to people and listen to people. My dad also has tics, and I have Tourette’s, more severe than he does.”

Eilish’s tics come on when she’s stressed; her emotions made manifest. I wonder about her anger: where does that end up, in such a pressurised life? “I’m an equestrian,” she says, “and that gives a lot of adrenaline and needs a lot of strength, and it’s exhausting. That is a big stress reliever for me. I’ve

been less angry and emotional since I've gotten back into that." She laughs. "My family, my God, makes me so angry." I'm surprised: they seem so close. "Oh, my family is like everybody's. There's anger – and love, so it kind of evens out."



With Finneas and their parents at Billboard Women In Music 2019.
Photograph: Kevin Mazur/Getty Images for Billboard

Eilish is at a strange time in her life; because of the pandemic, she's not been able to enjoy being a full adult. She turned 18 in December 2019, and is still too young to drink or smoke in California, though she doesn't do either. "In the last two years I haven't been able to do shows. Before that, I was always with my parents, and going along with my family, and doing what they were doing, or what my team was doing. Now I would love to just throw on a balaclava and, any festival I played, just go out into the crowd. It would be so much fun!"

She picks up the phone and walks into the bathroom. Is she going to have a wee? "Noooooooo way!" She digs out some dental floss, comes back to the bed, and starts flossing her teeth: an interview first, for me. At home with [Billie Eilish](#) is a relaxed affair, like a FaceTime catch-up with a mate.

Half of me wants to tell fans everything, because I think of them as friends. But I also really want to live privately

We talk climate emergency, the California fires. She is vegan, and environmentally conscious, replacing the usual rider for photoshoots with a long list of green standards. She doesn't think we take the climate crisis anywhere seriously enough. "The fires haven't gotten to me yet, but it's pretty much always a bit mad," she says. "I hate it. I dread it. I wish people actually gave a shit about global warming, because I feel like I'm the only one. So, I don't know. If we die, we die. And I think we probably will. The good thing is that the world will survive. The world knows what it's doing. The world is just like, 'Guys, if you don't do something to maintain this relationship...' You know, 'If you don't pay your rent, then you're gone, and I'm just going to go on without you.' The world has no problem killing us all. I'm just saying."

She turns to Shark, who is on the bed next to her, having a snooze. Will he wake up if she offers him chicken? "He's vegan, but watch this," she says. "Sharky, do you want some food?" Shark pings his eyes open.

She makes me laugh. She is so charismatic, such fun. Naturally confiding. No wonder her fans are besotted. I ask how hard it is for her to keep boundaries between them. "When it comes to fans," she says, "it's complicated. I don't even know where to start. I don't really know how to keep a boundary." She sighs. "I've had such a good relationship with the fans since the beginning, and they have literally been the number one priority for me. Half of me wants to tell the fans everything – every single thing I think and feel, and every person I meet, and every feeling I have – because I think of them as like my friends. But at the same time, I also really, really want to live privately. So it's tough."



Photograph: Lillie Eiger/The Guardian. Styling: Amanda Merten. Makeup: Robert Rumsey. Hair: Benjamin Mohapi. Manicurist: Erin Leigh Moffett [@beautyundone](#) for [@artdeptagencyla](#) using [@ORLY](#). Top and skirt: [Mia Vesper](#). Necklace and rings: [Harlot Hands](#). Earrings: [The Last Line](#). Shoes: [Yume yume](#)

She was a mega Justin Bieber fan herself when she was younger – a full-on no-boy-will-ever-live-up-to-him Belieber. There's a moving moment in *The World's A Little Blurry*, the RJ Cutler documentary about her, where she meets Bieber and can't speak (he's now a friend who gives her advice). Social media, which she once adored, has become more difficult as she's got more famous.

"With social media, I can't use it as much because it will live there for ever," she says, "and everyone besides the fans will also see. So that's annoying. It's like if you wanted to whisper a secret to a friend of yours, but while whispering it, they had a microphone in their ear, and it was shooting to 80 million people. You know what I mean? That's how it feels. I have this need to tell the fans these things and talk to them, and I used to do that, because it was a really tiny amount of people, when I first started out. And I would tell these whole stories about what happened and laugh about it, and it would become like an inside joke with the fans. But then those stories never go away."

And because of Covid, she hasn't been able to connect with her fans in any other way – usually she would be doing shows, her favourite thing – so their interest has become more frenzied, and she's further away than ever. She does understand their love, but she wants a life, too. Is there any way she can engage with them about music and art and hopes and dreams, without also having to reveal everything else?

"It's just funny because, like, as a fan, I would have *never* talked about what someone did, because it's not your business," she says, a bit exasperated. "It's literally not your life. You don't know any of these people. Nobody knows me, and I don't know anyone. It's nobody's business. Like, why the fuck do people care so much? And I don't actually think they *do* care online. With trolls, I think they just are bored, and that's it. I do not get it. I don't know when it became about everybody's personal life. Oh my God, it makes me so angry."

Eilish picks up the phone again, wanders around. It's nearly time for her to go to bed, a young woman in her childhood bedroom, messing with her hair and phone, telling her stories to people online. What does she want them to know?

"I guess I want them to understand that... just as you change, and your opinions and feelings and likes and dislikes and knowledge changes over the years, so do mine," she says. "Everyone's guilty of looking at celebrities and not processing that they're just a person. But they are. So it's the classic 'do to others what you would want to be done to you'. Because you're just some person and so is everybody else."

Happier Than Ever is out now

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Opinion Vaccines and immunisation

Should we shame the anti-vaxxers? That can only backfire

Emma Brockes



‘If they’re dumb enough not to get the vaccine, let them get sick,’ some thought. Now we know everyone would suffer



‘Under-vaccinated populations skew heavily towards Republican areas.’ A protester in Woodland Hills, California. Photograph: David McNew/Getty Images

‘Under-vaccinated populations skew heavily towards Republican areas.’ A protester in Woodland Hills, California. Photograph: David McNew/Getty Images

Sat 31 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

An email arrived from my cousin this week outlining how bad Covid cases are in her part of South Africa. Delta is surging, she wrote; their friends and neighbours were starting to die. Meanwhile, vaccination rates were terrible, with less than 5% of the population fully vaccinated. After filling me in on the rest of the family news, she assured me that she and her husband were on the waiting list for vaccines – for what it was worth. Her husband, she said, was “convinced they’re not safe”.

This was information to me. Not that a member of my extended family differed from me in his thoughts about drug trials and government-agency approval, but more broadly: wow, I had no idea my cousin was married to a lunatic.

This was a reflex response. At an odd time in the life of the pandemic, when every step forward is seemingly followed, immediately, by a jump in the numbers and a hasty step back, there is one, cast-iron certainty: that given the opportunity to call someone else crazy, it is almost impossible to turn down.

This consolation is particularly available in the United States at the moment, where a third of Americans eligible for the vaccine remain stubbornly unjabbed. (By contrast, in Britain, 88% of those eligible have received at least one dose.) That these vaccine holdouts fall demographically along existing lines of political division has made dismissing them as fanatics much easier. Under-vaccinated populations in the US skew heavily towards traditionally Republican areas in the south and midwest, particularly among those [without college degrees](#).

Articles abound about idiots partying, for example at a lake in Missouri. (“Personally,” [says](#) an unmasked, unvaccinated bartender serving unmasked, unvaccinated patrons, “I feel like my immune system is doing a good job, so why pump it full of something that we don’t really know what it is?”) The popular image of the vaccine-hesitant American is of a Trump supporter, his limited capacities further eroded by too much time spent absorbing the work of online conspiracy theorists.

Aspects of this image may well be true. The fact remains, however, that liberal disparagement of the vaccine-hesitant rests on a double standard. If we think of vaccine holdouts as taking their cues not from neutral information but from pre-existing narratives (democrats are bad; government is bad; it’s all a hoax) this is a dynamic we’re not entirely free from ourselves. The enjoyment one gets, when confronted with an anti-vaxxer from saying “these people are nuts”, and fitting them instantly into the category of dumb asshole, clearly delivers an emotional dividend as strong as the ones being indulged on the other side.

[Racing through deserted streets to get my Covid jab – it was like a scene from Blade Runner | Brigid Delaney](#)

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And the Covid anti-vax demographic isn't entirely clear-cut. Lots of parents who didn't think twice about giving their children MMR vaccines, for example, are on the fence about what to do in the autumn, when the US Food and Drug Administration will almost certainly approve the vaccine for the under-12s. I've heard similarly anxious murmurs from pregnant women getting their shots.

The closest I've come to understanding this mindset arose one afternoon, when I thought about the assurances given to women by the British government during the thalidomide scandal in the 1960s. For a second, I could feel it: the appeal of thinking that the real credulity here is blind faith in the government.

It didn't last. Neither, perhaps, will the tendency among those who are vaccinated to disparage those who remain hesitant, for the simple reason that it will backfire and end up hurting us more. During the first flush of the vaccine rollout in the US, there was a collective sense among the vaccinated population of: big deal, if they're dumb enough not to get the vaccine, let them get sick. Now, thanks to the latest advances in armchair epidemiology, we understand that if large portions of the population remain unvaccinated, not only will society's reopening be compromised but it will provide a petri dish for possible vaccine-resistant strains of the virus to develop in.

"Let them get sick" has evolved into a refrain that was familiar during the Trump years, for different reasons: "My God, these people are going to get us all killed."

Calling them dumb assholes, therefore, while it can feel really good, isn't a helpful strategy in winning people around to your side of the argument. This week Kay Ivey, Republican governor of Alabama, which has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the US, [said](#): "Time to start blaming the unvaccinated." And you understood her point of view. Yet pointing the finger doesn't work. "We all but shamed people," [Johnny Taylor](#), head of the Society for Human Resource Management, told the New York Times this week in reference to private companies' initiatives to persuade hesitant staff to get vaccinated. "But now we're at a point that none of that's working and we've got to close the gap."

Offering people \$100 for getting your shot, as [President Biden has urged states](#) to do, may work for some people; others may end up being forced to take it. (Biden has announced that the country's entire civilian federal workforce – well over 2 million people – will require vaccination too.)

Meanwhile, I'm trying to push back against the temptation to ask my cousin what's wrong with her husband, and in the process be less shut down myself. "Why does he think that?" I said.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist based in New York
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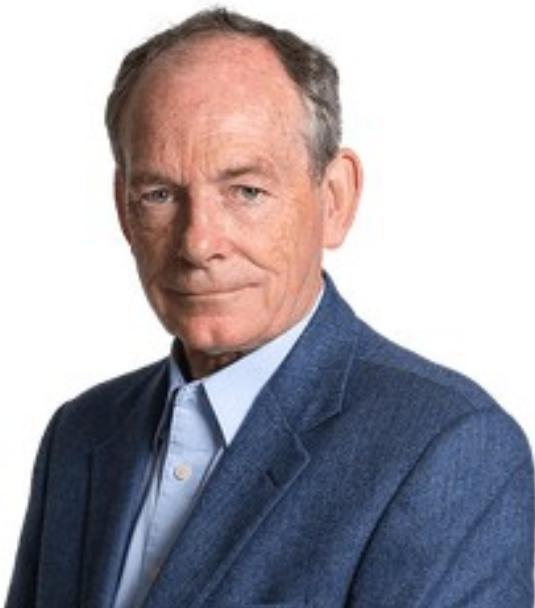
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[Opinion](#)[HS2](#)

Depleted and unwanted, HS2 hurtles on as Johnson's £100bn vanity project

[Simon Jenkins](#)



It has cost the taxpayer billions without a mile of track being laid – and it won't even go north of Crewe



‘Like Johnson’s garden bridge, the more extravagant it is, the more it can be described as world-beating.’ Photograph: Eddie Keogh/PA

‘Like Johnson’s garden bridge, the more extravagant it is, the more it can be described as world-beating.’ Photograph: Eddie Keogh/PA

Fri 30 Jul 2021 07.00 EDT

Britain’s new high-speed railway will not – repeat: not – get to the north of England. It will go back and forth from London to the Midlands and its chief beneficiaries will be London commuters. All else is political spin.

This became certain last week as the government’s internal major projects authority declared phase two of the HS2 project, to Manchester and Leeds, effectively dead. While the already-started London-to-Birmingham stretch is still marked at “amber/red” for “successful delivery in doubt”, anything north of Crewe has been designated “unachievable”. Its multitudinous issues “do not appear to be manageable or resolvable”. This comes not from the arms-length National Infrastructure Commission or last winter’s Oakervee report, both agreeing that going beyond Birmingham should be “reviewed”. This was the verdict of an arm of the Treasury and Cabinet Office.

Since HS2 has always been politics-driven – no rail strategy ever gave it priority – it has raced past every red light for a decade. By far Europe’s

biggest infrastructure scheme, it has finally been overtaken by its own extravagance. The pandemic has sent commuter numbers plummeting and wrecked any remotely plausible rate of return.

The only way of conveying the scale of Johnson's vanity in this vanity project is to convey its opportunity cost, a projected £106bn (and rising) over 20 years. That is the price of hundreds of new NHS hospitals or thousands of new secondary schools. It is seven times the cost of the education Covid recovery project proposed last spring but rejected by Johnson as too costly. It is the same additional annual cost to 2040 as the projected new social care scheme – still considered too expensive. HS2 is in that spending league. These are real choices.

This one train line will consume the equivalent of Britain's entire projected railway investment budget during its two decades of construction. Even the initial phase to Birmingham, at roughly £70bn, is twice the £40bn cost of the "northern powerhouse" rail system, which every infrastructure pundit agrees should be built first. Yet that system is now in serious danger of being delayed or never completed. HS2 is a glaring "levelling-down" of the north.

The railway's route was projected as a nostalgic echo of Robert Stephenson's first line from Euston to Birmingham, travelling between Birmingham's as yet non-existent Curzon Street station and a Euston station that does not link with HS1 and the Channel tunnel (and is not even on the new Crossrail). No one boarding a train in the north will be able to travel directly to France. As for Curzon Street in Birmingham, it is a mile from the New Street interchange and the west coast main line. This makes absolutely no sense.

Even Lord Adonis, for whom HS2 was the holy grail, accepts it should probably now stop at Acton's Old Oak Common hub. Meanwhile arguments, some of them court cases, continue over the trains themselves. They are not planned to tilt, which means that any time saved on a new track to Birmingham will be lost on winding track further north. A re-signalled King's Cross line could even get to Scotland faster. HS2 is more a taxpayer-funded theme park than a railway.

The project has long been out of control. [It is a spending black hole](#): figures in 2018 showed its latest boss Mark Thurston having to be paid over £660,000 a year, with 15 of his colleagues on over £250,000. A quarter of all HS2 staff, over 300 people, [received above £100,000](#). The Commons public accounts committee [declared it](#) to be “badly off course” and lacking even the most “basic financial controls.” This is despite the outlay of [£600m](#) annually on consultants, including [£35m on the “big four” accountancy firms](#).

It is never too late to stop a dud project, but it requires ever more courage to do so. Not a mile of track has been laid – the only tunnels have been built [by Swampy](#). What is intriguing is how HS2 has mutated from a transport project to political machismo – “infrastructure” that is good in itself. Like Johnson’s [garden bridges](#) and [crony PPE contracts](#), the more extravagant they are, the more they can be described as “world-beating”.

A recent Institute for Government seminar on HS2 received a [devastating report](#) on this whole saga from Professor Stephen Glaister of Imperial College. A Whitehall official present was heard to reflect that, in the light of Covid constraints, the railway could forget any other serious investment. Greater Manchester’s mayor, Andy Burnham, was an uncritical backer of HS2 when he thought it would get him fast to London. He will now find Birmingham blessed with cash that might have renovated his dire northern powerhouse rail network three times over – money he may now never see.

Rishi Sunak claims to want to start saving, not spending. Yet as long as HS2 sits in his budget he is hamstrung. He cannot tell doctors, nurses or teachers that he “cannot afford” their desperate requests. If he can afford HS2, he can afford anything. The truth is that this staggering vanity project survives for one reason. It looks good from London.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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Opinion Young people

Labour has a plan for young people. But it will struggle for their attention

Andy Beckett

The party is addressing job insecurity. Yet its proposals aren't sparking the controversy that an opposition party needs



Protesters during the 2019 climate protests in London. Photograph: Andres Pantoja/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Protesters during the 2019 climate protests in London. Photograph: Andres Pantoja/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 30 Jul 2021 10.00 EDT

Many things have disappeared from British politics since it became mostly about the pandemic. One of the most important has been the idea that the interests and grievances of people under 40 are worth a lot of attention from the main parties.

During the Jeremy Corbyn era younger voters enjoyed rare influence, [reinvigorating Labour](#) and frightening the Conservatives. Even when that period effectively ended at the 2019 election, Labour beat the Tories among voters aged 18 to 24 by an unprecedented [43 percentage points](#). The sea of young faces at Corbyn rallies looked like a mass awakening that would have consequences.

Yet since then our politics has aged again. The [Conservatives](#) under Boris Johnson have prioritised elderly people and treated the young with contempt. From the culture wars to the chaos in schools, benefits cuts to the climate crisis, the government's message to younger Britons has been consistent: you don't matter. Meanwhile Keir Starmer's Labour party has followed a milder version of the same strategy, concentrating on the often older voters it has lost while offering its younger supporters little.

But the desire of many young people for a different Britain has not gone. Beyond parliamentary politics, even people on the right acknowledge it. Earlier this month free-market thinktank the Institute of Economic Affairs published [Left Turn Ahead](#), a survey of young people's attitudes towards capitalism and socialism.

“Younger people really do quite consistently express hostility to capitalism, and positive views of socialist alternatives,” it found. The common argument that “they will grow out of it”, the survey continued, “is simply not borne out by the data. There are no detectable differences between the economic attitudes of people in their late teens and people in their early 40s”. These attitudes might be “a preview” of “mainstream opinion in Britain tomorrow”.

Despite this eye-catching conclusion, the IEA’s report has received relatively little attention. It doesn’t fit the prevailing view, on both the left and the right, that Britain is in a conservative phase that still has a long time to run. There is also a widespread, in some ways contradictory, assumption that young voters have always been leftwing – that their discontent with the status quo is nothing new.

But that assumption is mistaken. At every general election [from the late 1970s to the early 1990s](#), and again in 2010, as many or more under-45

voters chose the Tories as Labour. The radicalisation of the young, which has also happened in other parts of Europe and the United States, is a new feature of 21st-century western politics.

One reason for this radicalism's spread and persistence, despite its lack of electoral success, is that it is rooted in everyday experience – in particular, the modern experience of work. Zero-hours contracts, exploitative internships, graduates stuck in cafe jobs, a decade of stagnant wages, general precariousness. Work for all but the most privileged young employees is a daily reminder of capitalism's diminishing rewards.

These malign trends affect older workers too – which may be why, [at the last election](#), Labour won more votes than the Tories from [working Britons](#). But older workers may at least have savings or property, acquired when work was more rewarding. Only the under-45s have spent their entire working lives in the “flexible” labour market the Conservatives created and New Labour largely accepted. No wonder many young voters feel alienated from both parties.

So the launch by Labour earlier this week of a “[new deal for working people](#)” could be significant. Not just as the beginning of an answer to the charge that Starmer has no policies, but also as a set of possible reforms to Britain’s increasingly Victorian work culture, and as a way for Labour to reconnect with the young electorate it needs to remain a viable party in the long term and have a chance of returning to power.

Given Starmer’s caution up to now, [Labour’s proposals](#) are surprisingly ambitious. They include “the right to flexible working for all workers ... from day one of employment” – unless there is a conclusive reason that a job cannot be done flexibly or remotely. This flexibility could mean working hours arranged “around school runs and other family and caring responsibilities”. Labour envisages work “fitting around people’s lives rather than dictating their lives”.

The party also wants to create “a single status of ‘worker’ for all but the genuinely self-employed”, and to abolish the current qualifying periods for basic employee rights such as sick pay, holiday pay, paid parental leave and protection against unfair dismissal. It wants all workers to “have stable,

secure employment”, and the right to “disconnect from work at home outside of working hours”.

Labour claims these measures would “fundamentally change our economy”, and it is hard to argue. The balance of power between employer and employee would be significantly altered. Yet this idea has not provoked the kind of outrage this week that you might expect. The employers’ organisation the CBI said that, like [Labour](#), it wants “an inclusive economy”, and criticised the party’s proposals only in limited terms, as “overly prescriptive”.

Labour people involved with promoting the policies see the lack of controversy as a success. One source says: “When we talked about work under Jeremy Corbyn, we sounded too radical and endlessly triggered the rightwing press. It was a disaster. This time, we’re not going to lead with our chins.”

While the detail of the proposals has been laid out by Angela Rayner and Andy McDonald, two relatively leftwing figures, the broad case for them has been presented by Starmer in studiedly conservative and patriotic language: that a job should provide “dignity and security”, and that Labour “can make Britain the best place to work”. Thus his party hopes to appeal both to young voters and older ones. “Whether you’ve got a mortgage on a semi in Barnsley or you rent in Kentish Town”, says the Labour source, “you’re currently getting done over at work.”

The problem with Labour’s approach is that inclusivity can become blandness. In confrontational times, as both Corbyn and Johnson came to understand, getting attention and mobilising voters often involves naming enemies. This week, Labour’s work policies got far less coverage than the government’s cartoonish hi-vis crime measures.

If Labour doesn’t win back young people soon, these voters have alternatives. The Greens are already higher in the polls than they have been for years. Protest groups such as Extinction Rebellion have compelling causes and novel tactics. Even the Conservatives could conceivably appeal to the young again: they’ve done it before.

Young voters have decades to decide their political trajectories. Starmer has far less time.

Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist

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Opinion
UK riots 2011

A decade after Tottenham burned, social alienation means riots could happen again

David Lammy



Tory governments have ignored years of expert advice on family support, youth unemployment and police relations

- David Lammy is the Labour MP for Tottenham



‘Local residents could only watch as their shops, homes and businesses were senselessly turned into ashes.’ Tottenham High Rd in August 2011.
Photograph: Steve Burton / Rex Features

‘Local residents could only watch as their shops, homes and businesses were senselessly turned into ashes.’ Tottenham High Rd in August 2011.
Photograph: Steve Burton / Rex Features

Fri 30 Jul 2021 09.00 EDT

Every riot needs a spark. In 1985, I was a teenager when the Broadwater Farm riot took place just yards away from my home. It was lit by the death of Cynthia Jarrett, who suffered a stroke after police officers searched her home. Ten years ago, the riots that again [began in Tottenham](#) were ignited by the death of Mark Duggan, who was shot by the police.

The destruction that followed in both cases was horrific, as peaceful protests were hijacked by violent criminals. In 1985, PC Keith Blakelock was killed. In 2011, [eight police officers](#) in Tottenham were hospitalised and [more than £200m](#) of damage was caused nationwide. I will never forget walking up Tottenham High Road on the Sunday morning after the night before and seeing bricks through broken windows, alongside burned-out cars and shopfronts, and parents standing on the street in their pyjamas comforting their children. In both cases, the peaceful majority of local residents could

only watch as their [shops, homes and businesses](#) were senselessly turned into ashes by the flames of the mob.

The trail of petrol that allowed the summer 2011 rioting to spread to thousands of people across London, the Midlands, Merseyside, Manchester, Bristol, Yorkshire and beyond was something new. This was the first set of riots where social media – particularly the then popular [Blackberry Messenger](#) – was used to organise the chaos.

In the 10 years since my constituency and many others went up in flames, a succession of Conservative prime ministers have failed to take the action that is needed to shield us from the sparks or dampen the fuel that create riots. The then prime minister, David Cameron, commissioned the riots, communities and victims panel to [produce a report](#) outlining the steps needed to stop it happening again. The panel's report made 63 recommendations, including calling on the government to provide greater support for families, address youth unemployment, improve school attainment, improve police relations and tackle reoffending by young offenders.

[Youth violence likely to explode over summer, UK experts fear](#)
[Read more](#)

However, the government failed to formally accept or reject any of them – and [only a handful](#) were ever implemented. Since then, a succession of reports that address unfairness – including deaths in police custody (the [Angiolini review](#)), racism in employment (the [McGregor-Smith review](#)) and racial bias in the justice system ([my own](#)) – have repeated many of the same points. But they too have been mostly ignored.

Instead of acting to strengthen the fabric of society's fire blanket to reduce the risk of riots, over the past decade the government has decimated police forces, youth services and local authority budgets. While BlackBerry Messenger no longer exists, we are more addicted to our smartphones than ever, trapped in echo chambers served up by social media's algorithms. Our nation's divides – between rich and poor, young and old, city-dwellers and townspeople – are widening at an alarming rate. Once again, Tottenham is at

the centre of this hardship, with [the fastest growing rate of unemployment](#) in the country.

Communities like mine are scarred twice every time a riot happens. First by the physical damage to their homes, shops and possessions, and the violence committed against their family members and friends. Then, after the TV crews have left, the shop windows have been replaced and the streets cleared of rubble, they are hurt again: the residents will wake up in the relative calm knowing that the place they live will always be remembered for the damage caused there instead of what the place has created. No one wants to see a repeat of 1985 or 2011 in Tottenham, elsewhere in London or in any other part of the UK. Boris Johnson should know the pain caused by rioting. In 2011, when he was London's mayor, he was [booed and heckled](#) in Clapham Junction over dissatisfaction at his poor leadership during those difficult August days.

I say this with deep regret: by failing to implement the measures designed to tackle society's dissatisfaction, alienation and fragmentation, Johnson risks letting a spark set fire to the fuel all over again.

- David Lammy is the Labour MP for Tottenham; he is shadow lord chancellor and shadow justice secretary
-

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Myanmar

Myanmar junta accused of crimes against humanity six months on from coup

Human Rights Watch says army's suppression of protests has included torture and murder, as small protests mark milestone



Protesters burn Myanmar flags during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon on 29 July. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Protesters burn Myanmar flags during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon on 29 July. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Sat 31 Jul 2021 02.01 EDT

Human Rights Watch has accused Myanmar's military junta of crimes against humanity as small groups of protesters marked six months since the armed forces seized power.

Bands of university students rode motorbikes around the country's second-largest city Mandalay on Saturday waving red and green flags, saying they rejected any possibility of talks with the military to negotiate a return to civilian rule.

"There's no negotiating in a blood feud," read one sign.

Myanmar's army seized power on 1 February from the civilian government led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

[Myanmar junta frees more than 2,000 anti-coup protesters](#)
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New York-based Human Rights Watch said the armed forces' violent suppression of protests against the coup and arrests of opponents included torture, murder and other acts that violate international humanitarian conventions.

"These attacks on the population amount to crimes against humanity for which those responsible should be brought to account," Brad Adams, the group's Asia director, said.

The spokesman for the military authorities, Zaw Min Tun, could not be reached on Saturday to respond to the Human Rights Watch allegations.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners activist group says at least 6,990 people have been arrested since the coup. The group says the armed forces have killed 939 people, a number the military says is exaggerated.

The army has branded its opponents terrorists and says its takeover was in line with the constitution.

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Floods block food from reaching thousands of refugees in Colombia

Families fleeing drug gangs and paramilitaries have been cut off, with government accused of being ‘incapable’ of protecting them



Indigenous Emberá people and displaced farmers line up for food at a local school used as a shelter in Ituango, Colombia, on 27 July. Photograph: Daniel Alvarado/AFP/Getty

Indigenous Emberá people and displaced farmers line up for food at a local school used as a shelter in Ituango, Colombia, on 27 July. Photograph: Daniel Alvarado/AFP/Getty

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Sat 31 Jul 2021 02.01 EDT

Flooding and landslides have left thousands of refugees cut off from food supplies in Ituango, the conflict-strewn municipality in north-western Colombia.

Roads have been blocked by mud and debris after heavy rains, while helicopters have been unable to land. As a result, the delivery of food and medical supplies has been stymied, and communications cut off.

More than 4,000 people have fled the violence of militias operating in the resource-rich region in recent months. Bringing only what they could carry with them, entire families have fled from their homes in rural hamlets to the urban hub anchoring the region. According to the UN, 1,300 of those displaced are children.

“This is a terrifying situation; we’re seeing that the government is completely incapable of protecting these people,” said Isabel Cristina Zuleta, an activist with Rios Vivos, a local environmental watchdog. “The

government is not tending to the growing poverty there, nor to the cultural patrimony that is lost when peasant farmers have to abandon their homes, animals and livelihoods.”

The government in Bogotá have now dispatched military and police to the area, along with the interior minister.

“In terms of attention to the humanitarian crisis, from the national government, in collaboration with the government of Antioquia [the province where Ituango is located], almost 70 tonnes of humanitarian aid have been arranged, of which six have entered the municipality,” Daniel Palacios, the interior minister, said this week. “We have distributed more than 400 toilet kits and 700 additional kits will be arriving in the next few hours.”



Colombian soldiers offload humanitarian aid from a UN helicopter for displaced people in Ituango on 27 July. Photograph: Daniel Alvarado/AFP/Getty

The region has long been fought over by myriad armed groups, including dissidents from the now defunct Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (or Farc), a Marxist rebel group that waged war against the Colombian

government for five decades before signing a peace deal in 2016. That war cost [260,000 lives and forced more than 7 million](#) to flee their homes.

[Colombia's ex-guerrillas: isolated, abandoned and living in fear](#)

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The army is also present in Ituango, fighting drug trafficking groups such as the feared Clan del Golfo, which originated from state-aligned militias set up to fight leftist guerrillas. The region's strategic value – sitting on a corridor between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, as well as the nearby land bridge to Panama – has long rendered it a hot zone for drug runners.

“We don’t see any judicial measures that will halt these mass displacements,” said Zuleta, who spoke to the Guardian from the region. “And each time these displacements are worse. In February 500 people were displaced, now it’s 4,000.”

Zuleta said that while rains can complicate the delivery of aid and state assistance, they are foreseeable, given the region’s long history of landslides. “It’s not true that the rain is the only reason for the roadblocks,” Zuleta said. “It is predictable.”

Colombia’s meteorological agency, Ideam, on Thursday announced that rainfall is expected to rise by 40%, with swathes of the country’s Amazonia region, Caribbean coastline, and western interior all likely to bear the brunt of inclement weather.

“It is important to bear in mind that the rainy season is continuing, which increases the threat of landslides in unstable areas,” the agency said in a statement on Thursday.



More than 4,000 people have congregated in Ituango after abandoning their homes in north-western Colombia due to the threat from armed groups.
Photograph: Daniel Alvarado/AFP/Getty

In June, Brazil's central and western Amazon saw its [most severe annual flood season](#) on record, with homes, crops and cities washed out. Climatologists say rising temperatures are to blame, and that, if current trends continue, the weather events will only become more catastrophic.

In Peru, large parts of the north-east flooded in April, with [856 families affected](#) in Laredo province, according to the UN.

And in Latin America's most northern reaches, on the border between Mexico and the US, flash floods have [raged through Sonora](#), after months of drought this week.

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[Turkey](#)

Turkish fires sweeping through tourist areas are the hottest on record

Thousands of holidaymakers evacuated from Aegean Sea resorts as country fights more than 50 blazes

01:56

Wildfires raging across southern Turkey force residents to flee – video

[Jonathan Watts](#)

[@jonathanwatts](#)

Fri 30 Jul 2021 13.13 EDT

The heat intensity of wildfires in [Turkey](#) on Thursday was four times higher than anything on record for the nation, according to satellite data passed on to the Guardian.

At least four people were killed by blazes that swept through the tourist regions of Antalya and Muğla, forcing thousands of holidaymakers to be evacuated from their hotels by a flotilla of boats.

Conditions there and at the sites of dozens of other blazes throughout the country were tinder dry. Turkey's 60-year temperature record had been broken the previous week when Cizre, a town in the south-east, registered 49.1C.

After deadly heatwaves in the [Americas](#), [floods in Europe](#) and [China](#), and [fires in Siberia](#), the scenes of destruction in Turkey add to concerns about the growing ferocity of extreme weather in a climate-disrupted world.



Fires rage in the hills behind Icmeler Bay, in Muğla province. Photograph: Alina Kvasha/TASS

Local media published photos of popular Aegean Sea resorts surrounded by burning hillsides and forest and farmland reduced to ash. At Bodrum, in Muğla province, 80 hectares (197 acres) were burnt despite firefighting efforts on the ground and by air. The flames cut off two hotels, forcing the evacuation of more than 4,000 tourists and staff by coastguard and fishing vessels.

Wildfires are common in Turkey during the summer, but the blazes over the past two days have been exceptional. Satellite analysis by the EU's Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service show the heat intensity of the country's fires on Thursday reached about 20 gigawatts, four times higher than the previous daily maximum.

"Those numbers are off the scale compared to the last 19 years," said Mark Parrington, a senior scientist in the EU's Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service. He said the smoke from fires near Antalya and Mersin was now drifting to Cyprus.



Sunbathers watch as a helicopter carries water from the sea to dump on fires near Marmaris. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Residents of affected towns told reporters they had never seen anything like it. Ibrahim Aydin, a farmer, said he had lost all his livestock and nearly been killed while fighting the flames. “Everything I had was burned to the ground. I lost lambs and other animals,” he told the Daily Sabah. “This is not normal. This was like hell.”

Throughout the country, firefighters battled more than 50 blazes. Dozens were hospitalised by the fumes. As news spread, #PrayForTurkey was trending on Twitter with images of devastation and maps showing the locations of the more than two dozen fires across the country.

Government ministers speculated that the cause may be arson attacks by the Kurdish separatist movement PKK, but provided no evidence. Few domestic reports mentioned broader climate trends that are heightening the dangers of fire in Turkey and elsewhere.

Climate scientists have long predicted the Mediterranean will be hit hard by rising temperatures and changes in rainfall, driven by human emissions. Future wildfire risk is projected to increase in southern Europe, according to the last report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The Turkish climate scientist [Levent Kurnaz](#) said recent weather had created conditions for easy ignition. “The weather is extremely hot and dry. This helps to start fires. Our smallest mistake leads to great disaster,” he tweeted.



A wildfire on the southern Turkish coast near Manavgat, Antalya province.
Photograph: Kaan Soyturk/Reuters

This year looks likely to continue the trend. The [World Meteorological Organisation](#) tweeted that extreme heat is hitting the wider Mediterranean region with temperatures forecast to rise well above 40C in inland areas of Italy, Greece, Tunisia and Turkey. It has urged preparations to prevent health and water supply problems.

The heatwave in southern Europe is expected to linger well into next week with some forecasts suggesting it could be among the most severe on record. [The Turkish meteorological office](#) sees little likelihood of respite in the week ahead. Next week, Ankara and several other sites are set for temperatures more than 12C higher than the August average.

Wildfires have already hit southern Greece, forcing evacuations of villages outside the western port city of Patras. Blazes are also reported in Bulgaria and Albania. High temperature warnings have been issued in North Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria and parts of Romania and Serbia.

The EU has issued its highest fire risk alert to places in Italy, Portugal, Spain and parts of north Africa. Further east, a large fire broke out on Thursday in Lebanon, where one person has died.

“The risk is very high right now,” Parrington said. “We could start to see more fires in the coming weeks if these temperatures continue.”

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Ice

Greenland: enough ice melted on single day to cover Florida in two inches of water

- Data shows ice sheet lost 8.5bn tons of surface mass on Tuesday
- All-time record temperature of 19.8C in region on Wednesday



Greenland's melting season usually lasts from June to August. The Danish government data shows that it has lost more than 100bn tons of ice since the start of June this year. Photograph: Reuters

Greenland's melting season usually lasts from June to August. The Danish government data shows that it has lost more than 100bn tons of ice since the start of June this year. Photograph: Reuters

[Oliver Milman](#)

[@olliemilman](#)

Fri 30 Jul 2021 12.44 EDT

Greenland's vast ice sheet is undergoing a surge in melting, with the amount of ice vanishing in a single day this week enough to cover the whole of Florida in two inches of water, researchers have found.

The deluge of melting has reached deep into Greenland's enormous icy interior, with data from the Danish government showing that the ice sheet lost 8.5bn tons of surface mass on Tuesday alone. A further 8.4bn tons was lost on Thursday, the [Polar Portal monitoring website reported](#).

[Three Americans create enough carbon emissions to kill one person, study finds](#)

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The scale of disappearing ice is so large that the losses on Tuesday alone created enough meltwater [to drown](#) the entire US state of Florida in two inches, or 5cm, of water. Ice that melts away in Greenland flows as water into the ocean, where it adds to the ongoing increase in global sea level caused by human-induced climate change.

“It’s a very high level of melting and it will probably change the face of Greenland, because it will be a very strong driver for an acceleration of future melting, and therefore sea-level rise,” said Marco Tedesco, a glacier expert at Columbia University and adjunct scientist at Nasa.

Tedesco said a patch of high pressure is sucking and holding warmer air from further south “like a vacuum cleaner” and holding it over eastern Greenland, causing an all-time record temperature of 19.8C in the region on Wednesday. As seasonal snow melts away, darker core ice is exposed, which then melts and adds to sea level rise.

“We had these sort of atmospheric events in the past but they are now getting longer and more frequent,” Tedesco said.

“The snow is like a protective blanket so once that’s gone you get locked into faster and faster melting, so who knows what will happen with the melting now. It’s amazing to see how vulnerable these huge, giant areas of ice are. I’m astonished at how powerful the forces acting on them are.”

Greenland's melting season usually lasts from June to August. The Danish government data shows that the island has lost more than 100bn tons of ice since the start of June this year and while the severity of melting is less than in 2019 – when 11bn tons of ice was lost in a single day – the area affected is much larger in 2021.

"It's hard to say if it will be a record year for melting this year but there is a ton of warm and moist air over the ice sheet that's causing an amazing amount of melt," said Brad Lipovsky, a glaciologist at the University of Washington.

"The alarming thing to me is the political response, or lack of it. Sea-level rise is like a slow-moving train, but once it gets rolling you can't stop it. It's not great news."

If all the ice in Greenland melted, the global sea level would jump by [about 6 meters \(20ft\)](#), and although this is unlikely to happen on any sort of foreseeable timescale, scientists have warned that the world's largest island is [reaching a tipping point](#) due to the pressures exerted upon it by global heating.

Greenland's ice is melting faster than any time in the past 12,000 years, [scientists have calculated](#), with the ice loss [running at a rate](#) of around one million tons a minute in 2019. Greenland and the earth's other polar region of Antarctica have [together lost](#) 6.3tn tons of ice since 1994.

This rate of ice loss, which is accelerating as temperatures continue to increase, is changing ocean currents, altering marine ecosystems and posing a direct threat to the world's low-lying coastal cities, which risk being inundated by flooding. [A 2019 research paper](#) found the Greenland ice sheet could add anything between 5cm and 33cm to global sea levels by the end of the century. The world is on track for "the mid to upper end of that", Lipovsky said.

"It's very worrisome," said Tedesco. "The action is clear – we need to get to net zero emissions but also we need to protect exposed populations along the coast. This is going to be a huge problem for our coastal cities."

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[Dominic Cummings](#)

Dominic Cummings pushed through award of £580k Covid deal to Vote Leave ally

Former No 10 adviser pressed civil service to urgently approve polling contract, saying he had 'ordered it' from PM

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Cummings said in his witness statement that Hanbury was ‘the only firm’ who could do what was needed, start immediately and ‘we can trust to give their all and be honest’. Photograph: Jeff Overs/AFP/Getty

Cummings said in his witness statement that Hanbury was ‘the only firm’ who could do what was needed, start immediately and ‘we can trust to give their all and be honest’. Photograph: Jeff Overs/AFP/Getty

[David Conn](#)

Thu 29 Jul 2021 05.15 EDT

Dominic Cummings personally called a former colleague on the Vote Leave Brexit campaign and asked if his company would work for the government on its response to the Covid pandemic, leading to the award of a [£580,000 Cabinet Office contract](#) with no competitive process.

In an email on 20 March 2020, Boris Johnson’s former chief adviser asked the most senior civil servant responsible for contracts to sign off the budget immediately, and that if “anybody in CABOFF [the Cabinet Office] whines”, to tell them Cummings had “ordered it” from the prime minister.

The company, Hanbury Strategy, was founded by [Paul Stephenson](#) shortly after the 2016 Brexit referendum, during which he worked alongside Cummings as the Vote Leave director of communications. Hanbury also worked for the Conservative party on the 2019 general election campaign, with Cummings and Ben Warner, a data specialist who worked for Vote Leave before becoming an adviser at No 10.

The contract with Hanbury, to conduct opinion polls on the public’s view of the government’s Covid response, is subject to a legal challenge by the [Good Law Project](#) (GLP), which argues that it shows “apparent bias”, particularly given the company’s close connection to Cummings and the Conservative party.

A witness statement by Cummings and other documents including internal Cabinet Office emails were made public at a court hearing last Friday. They show that concerns were expressed among civil servants that some work Hanbury did with public money, such as polling opinion on opposition

politicians, including the Labour party leader, Keir Starmer, and Sadiq Khan, the Labour mayor of London, was carried out for the political advantage of the Conservative party.

On 26 May 2020, a Cabinet Office official emailed a colleague saying: “Hanbury measures attitudes towards political figures, which they shouldn’t do using government money, but they’ve been asked to and it’s a battle that I think is hard to fight.”

Cummings said in his witness statement that “my expert opinion” was that Hanbury would provide world-class polling work, and was the only firm who could do what was needed, start immediately and “we can trust to give their all and be honest”.

Cummings said that, on Sunday 15 March 2020, “I called many people to ask for help – epidemiologists, project managers etc. I also asked Paul Stephenson, a partner at Hanbury, if he would help with polling, data collection and modelling.”

Stephenson said they could start straight away. Cummings said in his statement: “Following my call to Paul Stephenson … I requested that Hanbury be engaged urgently to start conducting frequent large-scale polls immediately.”

On 20 March, Cummings emailed Alex Aiken, the head of government communications at the Cabinet Office, saying: “URGENT: Alex pls sign off immediately budget so Paul S can get out our large scale polls into field TODAY. Anybody in CABOFF whines tell them I ordered it from PM [OFFICIAL].”

Normal legal requirements for government contracts to be opened out to a full competitive tender were suspended due to the emergency of the pandemic, and the contract was directly awarded to Hanbury.

In a similar judicial review challenge to a direct contract – [awarded to Public First](#), a research company with longstanding connections to Cummings – [Mrs Justice O’Farrell ruled in GLP’s favour](#) in June, saying that even in the

pandemic the government should have conducted an exercise to consider other potential companies.

Aiken said in his witness statement that Cummings' email was not "an instruction to me or my team to appoint Hanbury ... this was purely an idea we were being asked to consider and I have pushed back on such requests before". Aiken said he decided to hire Hanbury after it provided a good proposal for opinion polling, and its work was of high quality which had "left a legacy" for Cabinet Office opinion polling.

He said he would have preferred the questions about Starmer and Khan not to have been asked, but explained it was not to seek political advantage; they were testing an idea for joint press conferences with government ministers, and to "benchmark" the credibility of government spokespeople. It was "well-intentioned but ill-considered", Aiken said. Cummings also said that polling was to see if the politicians "could help public health communication, it had no political purpose of any kind".

A Hanbury spokesperson said the company agreed to do the work "at extremely short notice" although it involved reputational risk.

[Revealed: £6bn NHS glove contract shows rocketing cost of PPE](#)
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They said: "Our work contributed to what was a hugely successful public health communications campaign which undoubtedly prevented many deaths. For that reason, if we had to make the choice again we would still agree to step up and help in this time of crisis."

The Cabinet Office has [appealed against the judgment](#) in the Public First case, and is also defending the GLP's challenge to the Hanbury contract, arguing it was awarded lawfully.

A Cabinet Office spokesperson said: "In response to an unprecedented global pandemic, the government acted with urgency to undertake vital research into public attitudes and behaviours. This research shaped crucial public health messages, helping us to protect the NHS and save lives."

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Vaccine passport plan intended to coax young to have jabs, says Raab

Foreign secretary says government will not ‘hold country back’ because some are not getting vaccinated

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A young woman received her Covid vaccine at a walk-in vaccine clinic at Tottenham Hotspur’s stadium in north London. Photograph: Tottenham Hotspur FC/Getty Images

A young woman received her Covid vaccine at a walk-in vaccine clinic at Tottenham Hotspur's stadium in north London. Photograph: Tottenham Hotspur FC/Getty Images

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent

@breeallegretti

Thu 29 Jul 2021 05.20 EDT

The government is using the threat of domestic vaccine passports to coax and cajole people into getting fully vaccinated, the foreign secretary has admitted.

Dominic Raab said ministers did not want to “hold the country back” just because some individuals were not coming forward to get inoculated, confirming publicly what many suspected about Boris Johnson’s sudden decision to [throw his weight behind certification for nightclubs](#).

In a U-turn last week, the prime minister announced that documentation would be compulsory for those gathering in crowded indoor venues across England from the end of September.

Nor did Johnson and Raab rule out university students needing to be fully vaccinated to live in halls of residence, and the Cabinet Office minister, Michael Gove, recently suggested it may be a requirement for fans at Premier League matches next season. Chelsea FC has already said it will require people attending matches at Stamford Bridge [to provide proof of being fully vaccinated](#).

Raab said he had seen first-hand in France that when people were told they would need domestic vaccine passports to access certain venues and events there was a “big surge” in people coming forward for their jabs.

“It is a little bit of coaxing and cajoling,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. He said the government was also “making clear” that if cases rise in September “we can control that with backstop, safeguard measures”.

Raab again hinted publicly at what several MPs have suspected, that vaccine passports may never come to pass, stressing that they could be made redundant if people got fully vaccinated.

The government's overriding focus was on increasing take-up, he said. "Once we've done that, the wider questions of vaccine certification become much less relevant and salient."

Decisions would not be taken until September, he said, but he insisted ministers would make sure students had advanced warning if they were going to need to be fully vaccinated.

Given that most university terms start in around eight weeks – the current gap between first and second doses – any later notice is unlikely to give students enough time to make sure they meet all of the health requirements demanded of them before term starts.

"The only steps that we will take are ones that will maximise the freedom that the vast majority of the country want and are hankering to enjoy," Raab said. "We've got to think of it with that in mind, the overwhelming good of the country, and encourage people to close that margin."

He denied the UK was headed in a direction similar to France of requiring proof of vaccination to allow people to gain entry to cinemas, bars and restaurants.

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Pressure on people to get vaccinated has increased significantly this week, with Gove saying those who refuse to get vaccinated are selfish.

He said certification was “the right way to go” for some venues so “people can be confident that those who are attending those events are less likely to be carriers of the virus”.

He also said that if businesses required a certain level of safety from customers, then people who remained unvaccinated by choice should not be surprised if they were barred, accusing them of “putting other people’s health and lives at risk”.

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Tokyo 2020 Olympics: China top medal table, Covid worries build – as it happened

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Australia's Fox takes canoe slalom gold with silver for Team GB's Franklin

- Jess Fox powered through to win first the C1 Olympic gold
- Mallory Franklin the second British woman to win canoe medal



Australia's Jessica Fox celebrates after pipping Mallory Franklin to gold.
Photograph: Yara Nardi/Reuters

Australia's Jessica Fox celebrates after pipping Mallory Franklin to gold.
Photograph: Yara Nardi/Reuters

[Barney Ronay at Kasai Canoe Slalom Centre](#)

[@barneyronay](#)

Thu 29 Jul 2021 04.01 EDT

There was joy for Great Britain's Mallory Franklin here as she produced a nerveless slalom paddle through 25 treacherous gates to take the silver medal behind Jess Fox of Australia.

Franklin narrowly missed out on becoming Team GB's first female gold medallist at Tokyo 2020, leading the field right up to the final run. But Fox is canoeing aristocracy and came to Tokyo as a powerful favourite. Going out last she produced a devastating paddle, clinical in the turns and imperious in the final sprint, destroying Franklin's fine time before celebrating with a heartfelt hug on the quayside with her mother, Myriam, who is also an Australian coach.

[No fairytale finish for Helen Glover after the mother of all comebacks](#)

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Franklin strolled along the quayside, medal around her neck, visibly delighted to have executed such a hard-honed skill in such a difficult sport and a winner of the first silver medal in this inaugural women's edition.

"It was really stressful being sat up there on the start line but I had a moment where I was like: 'This is actually really cool, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else right now,'" she said.

"The camera was panning round me and I caught a glimpse and smiled. It just reminded me of the environment and how crazy it all is, but it's just really cool."

Franklin was also fairly resigned on that final wait to see if Fox would beat her time and take gold. "It's really weird. We were stood there and I was like: 'I hate this bit.' I hate sitting and watching people you never know and then people like Jess come down and they're taking chunks.

"But it's nice to be in that situation, knowing you've done a good run and not knowing what will happen, but enjoying watching everyone else paddle."

The Kasai Canoe Slalom Centre is ringed by flyovers and industrial sidings, an urban inlet in Tokyo's sprawling waterfront. On a humid, high-summer day it was a cauldron of tension as the semi-final and final were completed within two hours.

This was also a powerful Australian family drama, a Neighbours with a paddle affair, as Fox's parents were involved in the sport. Her mother was a bronze medallist for France at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta (Fox could be heard answering a question in fluent French at the end of the day). Her father, Richard, who finished fourth for Team GB in Barcelona in 1992, was commentating at home on Australian TV as his daughter went for gold, an extraordinary how-did-I-get-here moment in anyone's life.

Fox had dominated the semi-final, canoeing within herself, but hitting every angle and putting down a marker for everyone else to follow. This is a high-

wire event, canoeing roulette, with a strange, esoteric balance between going with the flow, feeling the water and the urge to press the throttle.

[Jess Fox a fitting victor in Olympics arena she has dominated for so long](#)

[Kieran Pender](#)

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For all the perils of competition there was always a feeling the final would boil down to an Ashes-style shootout between Fox and Franklin.

The early paddlers seemed to freeze a little, with nobody willing to lay down a marker. Franklin was fifth out and looked smooth and controlled, with a stunning second half. Her time of 108.68sec was impressive, albeit with a powerful five-woman field still to come.

Maria Satila, of Brazil – a flamboyant, freewheeling paddler – attacked the course but came unstuck in the clinches. Andrea Herzog, Germany’s reigning world champion, was more controlled but could not close the gap. On the temporary podium Franklin let out a sigh, knowing now she was guaranteed a medal.

And so it came down to that final run. The pressure on Fox was uniquely pitched, both sporting and familial. “My dad sent me message this morning saying to take courage and be controlled, calm, confident, all the c words, and I just repeated those words to myself and just tried to focus on gate one,” she said.



Mallory Franklin during her silver medal-winning final run. Photograph: Dave Shopland/Shutterstock

It was a stunning final paddle, Fox making the course look simple and accelerating to the line in 105.04 before punching the water in joy.

A large canary yellow contingent burst out on to the quayside, including Fox Sr, waving her arms, a little overcome but also touchingly restrained in her coach's garb.

For Franklin, this is also a wonderful moment, with an added sense of blazing a trail.

She took up canoeing at the age of five, began to compete seriously in her twenties and became world champion in this event in 2017, but has spoken in the past of facing obstacles from traditional elements within canoeing.

Watching the high drama, the high quality of the field, it seemed mildly absurd this was the first time women have been allowed to compete in this class at the Games.

Franklin's next challenge is to prepare for her own wedding, which she suggested would be an even more nerve-shredding public event. And invitations to appear on a Question Of Sport are also welcome, after a

fashion: “If they want a person that can’t answer questions and just hides in her shell half the time then sure.”

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Pakistan to ban air travel for unvaccinated – as it happened

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City of Nanjing isolated as China fights worst Covid outbreak in months

Flights have reportedly been cancelled and checkpoints set up to verify travellers' health status amid Delta

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Staff spray disinfectant at a temporary “Fire Eye” laboratory used for Covid-19 coronavirus testing at an exhibition centre in Nanjing in China’s eastern Jiangsu province. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Staff spray disinfectant at a temporary “Fire Eye” laboratory used for Covid-19 coronavirus testing at an exhibition centre in Nanjing in China’s eastern Jiangsu province. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Helen Davidson in Taipei

@heldavidson

Thu 29 Jul 2021 02.05 EDT

Health authorities in [China](#) have set up checkpoints and reportedly suspended flights in the eastern city of Nanjing in the country’s worst coronavirus emergency in months.

More than 170 people have been diagnosed with the Delta variant in the past 10 days. The main outbreak is centred on Nanjing, in Jiangsu province, but connected cases have reportedly been identified in Beijing and other provinces including Anhui, Liaoning, Sichuan and Guangdong.

The Global Times reported Nanjing airport was suspending all flights until mid-August, citing an anonymous source. Sichuan province has ordered all new arrivals to undergo 14 days of quarantine in facilities and another seven at home.

Nanjing authorities this week embarked on a second round of mass testing for its 9.3 million population. Entry and exit restrictions on residents have been strengthened, some public transport has been suspended, and taxi and rideshare drivers have been instructed not to leave the city limits.

[China refuses further inquiry into Covid-19 origins in Wuhan lab](#)

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Other cities in Jiangsu have reinforced anti-virus measures, including 18 checkpoints on highways entering Suzhou, to check the health code status of people travelling from Nanjing. Suzhou authorities have also suspended road passenger transport between the city and Nanjing.

The Nanjing cluster is [at least the third outbreak](#) of the highly infectious Delta variant in China, after one near the Myanmar border in Yunnan earlier this month, and another in southern Guangdong in May-June.

Nine cases were first detected on 20 July, all among airport staff in Nanjing. Another 24 local cases on Wednesday brought the total number believed connected to the cluster to 171.

Among the recently confirmed cases are people who joined a crowd of 2,000 at a show in Zhangjiajie, Hunan on 22 July. All attendees, who are now spread across China, have been designated “high risk”. People who have since been diagnosed in Dalian and Chengdu reportedly attended the show, with some having travelled there through Nanjing’s Lukou international airport.

Much of the focus is on the airport, where cleaners – who were cleaning planes that had arrived from overseas and domestic flights – contracted the virus and passed it on to colleagues and family.

The central commission for discipline inspection has publicly criticised the airport management, accusing it of negligence. In a [statement](#) on Thursday, the most senior enforcement body of the Chinese Communist party said the airport lacked supervision and had unprofessional management, and that epidemic prevention and control measures had not been properly implemented. It was highly critical of management for not separating staff and operations for international and domestic flights, and called for “deep reflection and rectification”.

China has largely controlled the virus’s spread since it first emerged in Wuhan and prompted a lengthy lockdown. Most of the relatively frequent new outbreaks are met with localised lockdown measures, mass testing and tracing, and a nationwide vaccination program using its domestically produced vaccines.

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Coronavirus

Top Republicans' new tone on vaccines having little effect on hardcore holdouts

High-profile politicians have changed their tune on Covid inoculation but pollsters say part of their base remains unswayed



Governor Kay Ivey of Alabama receives a Covid-19 vaccine shot in Montgomery in January. Last week she said it was time to start blaming unvaccinated people for refusing to get the shot. Photograph: Mickey Welsh/AP

Governor Kay Ivey of Alabama receives a Covid-19 vaccine shot in Montgomery in January. Last week she said it was time to start blaming unvaccinated people for refusing to get the shot. Photograph: Mickey Welsh/AP

Daniel Strauss

@danielstrauss4

Thu 29 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Almost like a switch had been flipped, a set of high-profile Republican political figures and conservative media personalities recently shifted their stance on the Covid-19 shots and became more outspoken and proactive in urging Americans to get vaccinated.

Governor Kay Ivey of Alabama, the state with the lowest proportion of fully vaccinated people in the country, said last week it was time to shame vaccination holdouts. Commentator Sean Hannity, who had previously called the pandemic a hoax, offered an on-air argument for viewers to get vaccinated. In Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis, who had been selling merchandise mocking the use of masks, said the anti-Covid vaccines “are saving lives”. The Republican congressman Steve Scalise of Louisiana, where only 36% of eligible residents are fully vaccinated, finally got inoculated publicly after refraining from doing so.

[Sarah Sanders promotes ‘Trump vaccine’ but says Americans should ‘pray about it’](#)

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In Kentucky, Senator Mitch McConnell, the top Senate Republican, is planning to use campaign re-election resources to run radio ads in the state urging voters to get vaccinated, according to [Reuters](#).

And on the campaign trail, Donald Trump’s former press secretary, Sarah Sanders, who is the favorite to become the next governor of Arkansas, sent out a long email to supporters titled Why I Got Vaccinated urging them to get the shot too (while also bashing the country’s leading infectious disease expert, Anthony Fauci).

All together it’s a shift among some of the most prominent voices within the Republican party and among conservatives toward encouraging vaccine use rather than leaving it up to personal choice.

Polls have shown that conservative Americans are much more likely to be unvaccinated and hesitant to get the shot. Some observers have welcomed the recent shift by high-profile [Republicans](#), but others warn it may be too little, too late.

States with the lowest percentages of fully vaccinated residents all tilt reliably Republican, according to data continuously updated by the [Mayo Clinic](#). Rates in those states are lower than 40%. By contrast the states with the highest percentage of vaccinated people are near 70%, and largely lean Democratic.



Anti-vaccine protesters rally against coronavirus restrictions in Raleigh, North Carolina, at the weekend. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The shift in tone comes as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends people resume wearing masks inside in areas where the Delta variant has led to a surge in cases.

Polling [shows](#) that rank-and-file Republicans are more likely to listen to “Republican elites” than to Democratic elites who encourage them to take a vaccine. But in interviews with half a dozen Republican pollsters, including ones who have held focus groups on encouraging holdouts to get vaccinated, they say that there is still a block of Americans who won’t be moved even if

it's a Republican urging them to get the shot – no matter if there's a chance they could win \$1m or a shotgun or tuition money or fishing permits, incentives that governors across the country have used to motivate people who are resistant to getting vaccinated.

"People just don't trust politicians," said the Republican pollster Brent Buchanan. "So even Trump saying, 'I've been vaccinated, get the vaccine' doesn't undo how people have sought out information to justify their position."

Jim McLaughlin, another Republican pollster who advised Trump on his re-election campaign said "your best messenger is your own physician".

"We've tested all that stuff with these folks and none of that's moving them. Be a millionaire? Not interested. I mean when you survey these conservative Republicans ... who are against getting the vaccines it is literally having the ostrich with the head in the sand," said Greg Strimple, a Republican pollster who has conducted focus groups with holdouts.

"I really do think the secret to *potentially* getting this group vaccinated is going to be some sort of peer-to-peer, more likely family-member-to-family-member, effort," Strimple said.



‘Some ... like Mitch McConnell have always been forceful advocates for vaccinations, driven by the fact that he had polio as a kid and we no longer have polio because of vaccines.’ Photograph: Joshua Roberts/Reuters

One thing that’s clear among pollsters: the change in tone from Republican lawmakers has not been prompted by new polling. Rather it’s because of the increasing urgency that US political figures are feeling about a pandemic that is far from over and may be on the brink of entering a new, dangerous phase.

“There’s data out there but it’s not polling data, it’s Covid data. The surge in the Delta variant is coming largely in Republican states and particularly in Republican rural counties of states and it’s that data that has led these Republican leaders to speak out more forcefully,” said Whit Ayres, a veteran Republican pollster.

[Majority of Covid misinformation came from 12 people, report finds](#)

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“Now, it needs to be said that some Republican leaders like Mitch McConnell have always been forceful advocates for vaccinations, driven by the fact that he had polio as a kid and we no longer have polio because of vaccines. But there’s no question that more Republican figures like Kay Ivey, the governor of Alabama, have been more vociferous of late because so many people are getting infected who need not get infected if they simply got the vaccine.”

At this point, political messengers are unlikely to be able to undo the harm caused by [misinformation sources on Covid vaccines](#), Buchanan said.

“Yeah, there are holdouts because the information sources – conservative cable channels and a massive amount of disinformation on Facebook and other social media sites – have persuaded millions of people that the vaccines are either not necessary or downright dangerous,” Buchanan said.

“There are a lot of people who believe that getting a vaccine will cause fertility problems later on. They’ve heard that Bill Gates is injecting a tracking device under your skin that you can use to track your movements

later on. There's just a ridiculous amount of garbage that's presented as fact on social media and in some cases on cable TV. And a lot of people believe that."

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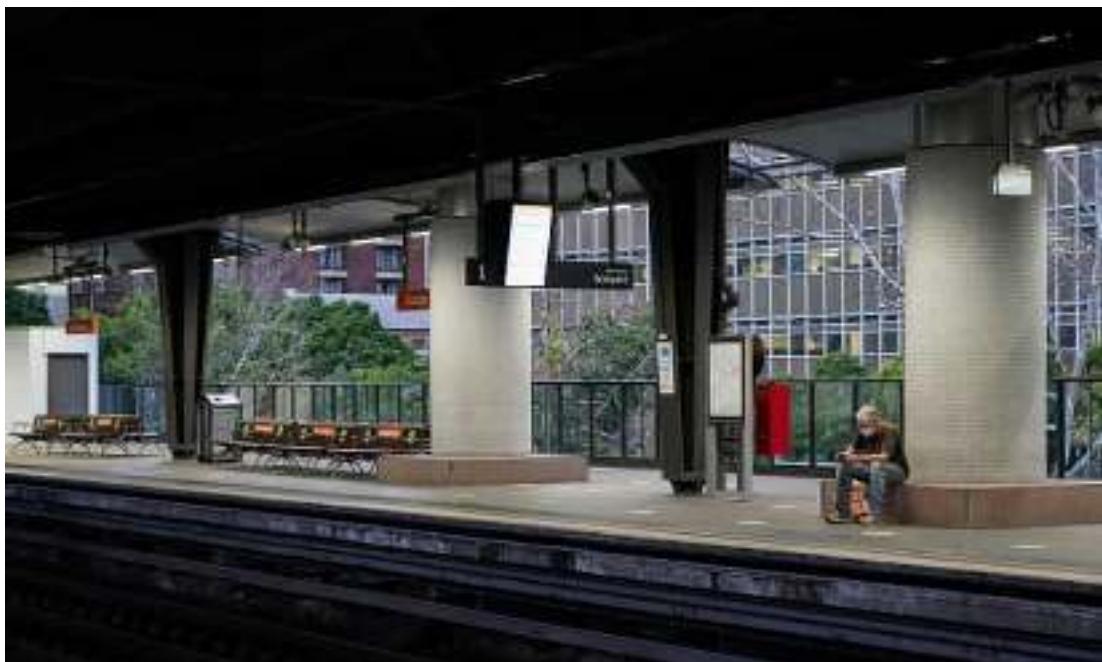
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[Sydney](#)

Will Sydney's Covid lockdown work and how different are restrictions to Melbourne's 'ring of steel'?

State premiers including Victoria's Daniel Andrews have criticised the lockdown settings in NSW as too lax

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A lone passenger in a face mask waits at the quiet Circular Quay train station during Sydney's Covid-19 lockdown. The lockdown has been extended but there are questions about whether New South Wales can do more to slow the spread. Photograph: Loren Elliott/Reuters

A lone passenger in a face mask waits at the quiet Circular Quay train station during Sydney's Covid-19 lockdown. The lockdown has been extended but there are questions about whether New South Wales can do more to slow the spread. Photograph: Loren Elliott/Reuters

Elias Visontay

@EliasVisontay

Thu 29 Jul 2021 00.11 EDT

Greater Sydney's [lockdown has already been extended by another four weeks](#) but New South Wales health authorities are facing questions about what more can be done to limit the spread of Covid-19, as well as criticism from other states.

A new daily record of 239 cases was announced on Thursday, along with tightened restrictions targeted at eight local government areas (LGAs) – Fairfield, Canterbury-Bankstown, Liverpool, Cumberland, Blacktown, Parramatta, Campbelltown and Georges River.

Masks must be worn outdoors in these areas and a 5km travel limit has been established, in addition to existing restrictions and testing requirements that are stricter than rules for the rest of the city.

Despite this, premiers from other states have criticised the lockdown settings in place in [Sydney](#) for being less strict than the stage-four restrictions introduced at the peak of Melbourne's second-wave lockdown last year.

The Victorian leader [Daniel Andrews](#) last week called for a “ring of steel” to be put up around Sydney, something he claims to have enforced last year to limit Covid spreading out of Melbourne.

NSW health authorities have acknowledged the majority of new transmissions are among essential workers, their households and those

visiting family in other homes, but details of the types of workplaces where transmission is occurring have not been made public.

The NSW premier [Gladys Berejiklian](#) has stared down calls to introduce measures including the curfew that was introduced in Melbourne, citing a lack of health advice to support the restriction.

[Just 39% of NSW residents over 70 are fully vaccinated against Covid, despite push for jabs](#)

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Expert opinion is split on whether adopting Melbourne's stage-four rules such as a city-wide outdoor face masks mandate and curfews would work to limit Covid spread in Sydney, or whether its geography, demographics and the infectiousness of the Delta variant would blunt the benefit of some measures.

However it is broadly agreed that for case numbers to slow and the outbreak to end, movement across Sydney has to further decrease from current levels – at least until millions more doses of vaccine are administered.

So just how different is Sydney's lockdown compared to the peak of Melbourne's stage-four restrictions? And what do experts think will work in Sydney?

Curbs on movement

Sydney's lockdown has been progressively strengthened since it was first introduced in late June, with current rules limiting reasons for leaving home.

For most of Sydney, residents are allowed to leave their home to exercise with one other person from a different household, but there is no limit on members of the same household exercising together.

These residents cannot travel more than 10km, with the same distance limit also applying to shopping for essentials.

[embed](#)

Tighter restrictions were in place during stage-four restrictions in Melbourne this year, with residents only allowed to shop or exercise within 5km of their home. Exercising was permitted only in groups of two, regardless of whether they were from the same household.

A curfew was also imposed for Melbourne residents between 8pm and 5am, and face masks were mandatory for all indoor and outdoor settings. Masks do not currently need to be worn outdoors in most of Sydney.

However, under targeted restrictions in place for the eight LGAs of most concern in Sydney, movement rules are stricter than Melbourne's stage-four lockdown in some ways, with residents unable to leave their locality to exercise or shop unless they are an essential worker.

For these residents, masks must now be worn whenever residents or workers in these LGAs leave their home, even outdoors, and their travel distance has been shrunk to 5km from home.

Michael Toole, professor of international health at the Burnet Institute in Melbourne, has studied Melbourne's stage-four lockdown in detail and has been modelling the progression of Sydney's current outbreak.

[NSW Covid update: 177 new cases as some construction restrictions lifted and Sydney lockdown extended by a month](#)

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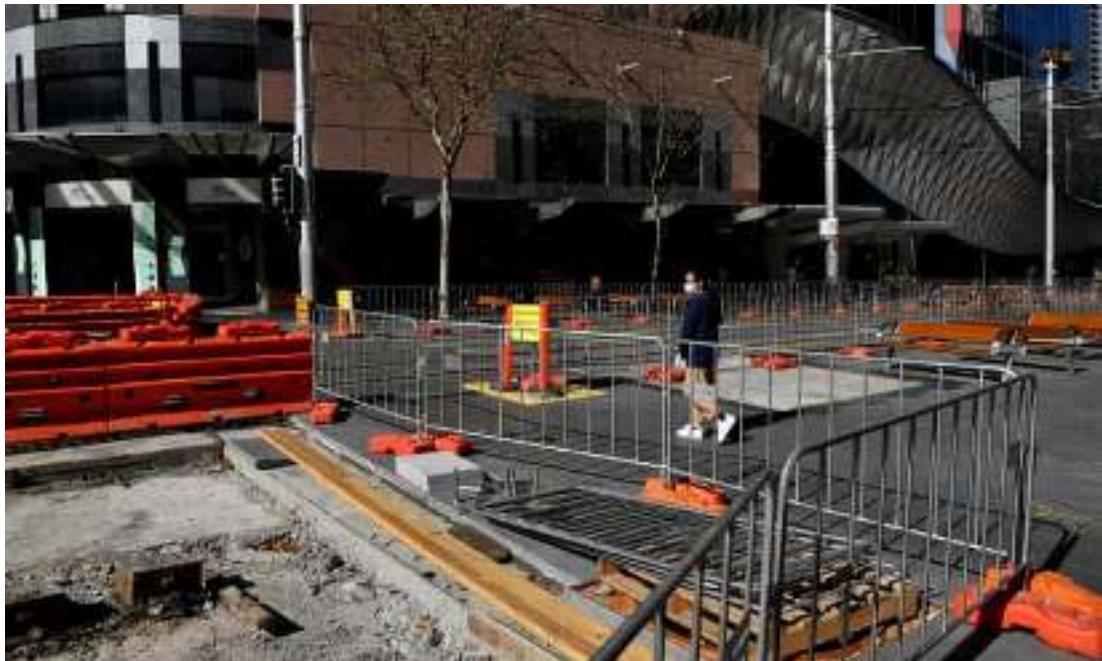
While a handful of rules have been tightened since his modelling was formed, Toole stands by a prediction that under Sydney's current lockdown settings, it [could take months, potentially until the end of the year](#), for case numbers to get closer to zero.

He acknowledged that without the current lockdown, cases would likely be in the thousands, but that more needs to be done to reduce the virus reproduction rate to below one – meaning it is lowering overall.

[embed 2](#)

He points to a current reproduction rate of lower than one ($R0.8$) in south-west Sydney as proof that tighter measures are needed, but believes “Sydney can’t keep playing whack a mole”.

“It might be looking successful in south-west Sydney but now they’re behind the curve in western Sydney, and the rest of Sydney really,” he said, noting the reproduction rate in these areas was now above one.



Construction has been stopped in Sydney but it will soon be allowed to resume. Photograph: Joel Carrett/EPA

Toole is sceptical of the commonly raised claim in NSW that no transmissions have been recorded outdoors (he notes transmission of Delta at the Melbourne Cricket Ground this month) and believes that even if none have, outdoor masks should now be implemented across the city.

He said it was difficult to know which measures of Melbourne’s stage-four rules worked and which were less effective, so was cautious of ruling out the efficacy of a curfew in Sydney.

“With Delta the horse bolts ... they should be using everything in the toolkit,” Toole said.

Not all experts share Toole’s view.

Prof Peter Collignon, infectious diseases physician and microbiologist at the Australian National University, agrees measures to tighten Sydney's lockdown have not been successful in reducing daily numbers, and thinks action must be taken to further reduce movement and the spread of the virus.

However, he believes measures should be based on evidence of transmission and breaches of lockdown.

"Unless we find a whole lot of people at night doing the wrong thing, a curfew doesn't make sense."

['So relieved': belated Covid support welcomed by welfare recipients in Sydney lockdown](#)

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Collignon said the current lockdown settings would be more effective if a greater proportion of [people were obeying the rules](#). While he said policing had a role to play in improving compliance, communicating the specifics of the rules effectively was equally important.

"I'm not sure making rules tighter for the sake of it will do as much as making sure existing rules are followed, and that only happens when the vast majority of the population understands the rules properly," he said.

Collignon is sceptical of the benefit of enforcing mask-wearing outdoors across all of Sydney. Instead, he thinks mandating face shields indoors among essential workers would do more to limit spread of Covid, pointing to studies out of China that people with glasses were significantly less likely to contract Covid.

"If you're worried about particles in your nose or mouth, you need to be worried about your eyes ... A face shield on top of a mask provides an extra 20% reduction in transmission risk," he said.

Working and business rules

In a stark admission last week, Berejiklian said the [majority of new cases infectious in the community were "derived from critical activity"](#) – either

essential workers or people buying groceries and medicines – and said further restrictions were unlikely to reduce these types of transmissions.

While retail had more lenient restrictions in the earlier weeks of Sydney's lockdown, rules have been tightened, and only essential and frontline businesses are now allowed to open.

embed

Detailed lists of permitted businesses have been drawn up by health authorities in NSW, as they were also done in [Victoria](#) for stage-four restrictions.

However, some non-frontline Melbourne industries, including abattoirs, were subject to strict ratios to limit onsite presence – something not currently done in Sydney.

From Saturday, construction will also be allowed to resume in Sydney, with similar restrictions to Melbourne's stage-four rules for the industry.

Collignon, who is also a member of the Infection Control Expert Group, which advises the Australian [Health](#) Protection Principal Committee on infection prevention and control issues, believes measures like face shields should be implemented for essential workers, and notes that transmission was seen between essential workers “sharing tea rooms during their breaks” during Melbourne's lockdown last year.

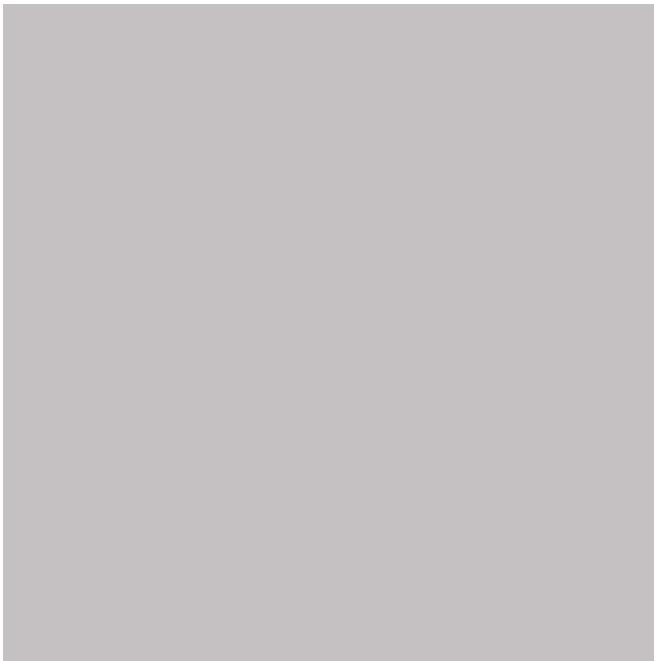
“If essential workers are taking their masks off to eat, they should be wearing face shields.”

Toole believes workplace ratios to reduce how many workers are onsite that were used in Melbourne should be looked at in Sydney, but says little data about what types of workplaces are hosting transmission has been provided by NSW authorities.

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Man v food: is lab-grown meat really going to solve our nasty agriculture problem?

Photograph: Svetlana-Cherruty/Getty/iStockphoto

If cellular agriculture is going to improve on the industrial system it is displacing, it needs to grow without passing the cost on to workers, consumers and the environment

by [Jan Dutkiewicz](#) and [Gabriel N Rosenberg](#)

Thu 29 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Americans will eat about 2bn chicken nuggets this year, give or take a few hundred million. This deep-fried staple is a way of profiting off the bits that are left after the breast, legs and wings are lopped off the 9 billion or so factory-farmed chickens slaughtered in the US every year. Like much else that is ubiquitous in contemporary life, the production of nuggets is controlled by a small group of massive companies that are responsible for a litany of social and ecological harms. And, like many of the commodities produced by this system, they are of dubious quality, cheap, appealing and easy to consume. Nuggets are not even primarily meat, but mostly fat and assorted viscera – including epithelium, bone, nerve and connective tissue – made palatable through ultra-processing. As the political economists Raj Patel and Jason Moore [have argued](#), they are a homogenised, bite-size avatar of how capitalism extracts as much value as possible from human and nonhuman life and labour.

But if chicken nuggets are emblematic of modern capitalism, then they are ripe for disruption. Perhaps their most promising challenger is a radically different sort of meat: edible tissue grown in vitro from animal stem cells, a process called cellular agriculture. The sales pitch for the technology is classic Silicon Valley: unseat an obsolete technology – in this case, animals – and do well by doing good.

Intensive animal agriculture, which produces nuggets and most of the other meat that Americans consume, keeps the price of meat artificially low by operating at huge economies of scale, and shifting the costs of this production on to people, animals and the planet. The industry [deforests](#) the land, releases hundreds of millions of tonnes of [greenhouse gases](#) every year, creates [terrible working conditions](#) at abattoirs, and necessitates abhorrent animal treatment on farms, all while engaging in price fixing, [lobbying](#) for environmental and labour deregulation, and pushing for unconstitutional anti-whistleblower laws.

The problem is that people love eating meat, with global production and consumption growing steadily, and little sign of a collective vegan epiphany on the horizon. This makes intensive animal agriculture a wicked problem: something so obviously detrimental, and yet so politically and socially entrenched, that it is unclear where reformers should even start. Cellular agriculture, however, seems to offer a potential socio-technological hack: it could eliminate much of the damage that system causes, without requiring consumers to give up meat.

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Long the stuff of science fiction and philosophical musing, cellular agriculture is fast becoming a reality. In December 2020, the San Francisco-based food company Eat Just [launched](#) the world's first commercially available cell-based meat at the private 1880 club in Singapore. Its form – a chicken nugget – was partly symbolic, partly necessary: the technology isn't advanced enough yet to replicate a chicken's breast, wings or legs. But the entire animal kingdom is ripe for replication. The first cellular agriculture prototype presented to the public was a burger patty created by a research team at [Maastricht University in 2013](#). The company that grew out of that project, Mosa Meat, is now speeding toward market release of cell-based beef. Aleph Farms, an Israeli startup, has [3D printed](#) a cellular ribeye steak. Shiok Meats of Singapore is cultivating shrimp without the shrimp. Berkeley's Finless Foods is tackling the endangered bluefin tuna. And Australia-based Vow wants to diversify beyond the most commonly eaten species to zebra, yak and kangaroo.

Most of this development is being carried out by a fast-multiplying number of startups clustered in the world's tech hubs. They are supported by a global network of ultrawealthy investors and venture capitalists who have ploughed more than \$7bn into alternative proteins over the past decade, including about \$900m into cultured meat. Richard Branson, Bill Gates and a slew of other billionaires are investors and hype men for the technology; the Maastricht burger was funded in part by Google co-founder Sergey Brin. But major corporations are getting in on the ground floor, with the pharmaceutical behemoth Merck investing in Mosa Meats and the meat giant Tyson Foods buying a stake in Silicon Valley's Upside Foods.

That private capital is working overtime to disrupt farming with synthetic biology is likely all that boosters and critics alike need to know about the technology. Techno-optimists see a future of widely available "clean meat", as ecologically and ethically superior to the original as solar power is to coal. Opponents see corporate-controlled lab meat that slots all too comfortably into a broken capitalist food system.

Both sides have some truth to them, but they wrongly assume that the outcomes have been determined in advance. There was nothing predestined about the forces that drove the food system to ever-intensifying mechanisation, labour exploitation and environmental ruin in the past century; it happened because of political choices, collective and individual. Similarly, we need not be prisoners of tech monopolists slapping grey "vat meat" on our plates. What we need is an analysis of the possibilities of cellular agriculture – what this novel food technology, with the right policies and investments, could make possible for consumers, workers, animals and the environment.

To grasp the promise and perils of cellular agriculture, we need to understand the system it might change. Our current animal agriculture policies and practices do immense damage, and uprooting them will require enormous collective effort, but history shows that the system can change radically, even in the course of a generation.

For consumers, the current food system is defined by abundance and low prices. Americans spend just under 10% of their disposable income on food,

among the lowest rates in the world, and eat a whopping 122kg of meat each a year, including 55kg of chicken. (For comparison, in the UK the numbers are lower but still unsustainable, at about 80kg of meat per person, including 32kg of chicken.) But there's a high price to pay for low costs. Today, billions of genetically indistinguishable chickens live and die in squalid misery in supersized facilities designed around high efficiency and low margins. Three major processing companies – Tyson, Perdue and Koch – control the majority of the US market for chicken meat. The industry either functions as a quasi-monopsony, with a small number of buyers imposing prices and conditions on producers, or in some cases is vertically integrated so that Big Chicken directly controls most of the value chain.

This gives the industry tremendous economic power over farmers, workers and consumers. Farm owners on contract with major processors are forced to compete so hard against one another that many are lucky if they barely break even. Chicken processing is gruelling, low-paid, dangerous work on high-speed slaughter lines that kill 140 birds a minute. A 2015 Oxfam report on the industry told stories of workers forced to wear nappies on the line because they were denied toilet breaks, and of others crippled by repetitive motion injuries. Meanwhile, chicken giants including Tyson and Pilgrim's Pride recently settled nine-figure lawsuits for price fixing brought by supermarkets, restaurants and individual consumers. The size and wealth of these companies has also given them remarkable political heft. One of the most potent recent examples of this came in April 2020 when, at the industry's urging, then-president Donald Trump invoked the Defense Production Act to keep abattoirs open, even as thousands of workers fell ill with Covid-19.



Eat Just's nugget, made from lab-grown chicken meat, at a restaurant in Singapore, 2020. Photograph: Eat Just/AFP/Getty Images

Meanwhile, cramming animals into factory farms and clearing land for more feed crops has increased the likelihood of outbreaks of zoonotic diseases such as swine flu, avian influenza or Covid-19. The system disables and kills even more people through non-infectious diseases: in the past 60 years, changes in diet have contributed to extraordinary increases in the number of Americans with obesity, diabetes and heart conditions.

Two things brought us to this grim place. The first is a profit-led drive for ever-increasing efficiency in agriculture, which has been in train for at least two centuries. The second is the proliferation of agricultural policies that, in the US in particular, have created an endless trough of subsidies, but barely any labour or environmental regulations. The whole system has been engineered primarily for the benefit of the owners of farmland and huge agribusiness firms, and at the expense of the public.

Nowhere is this more visible than in the case of meat. Animal slaughter was industrialised by the meatpackers of late-19th-century Chicago, where 40,000 mostly low-wage Black and immigrant labourers slaughtered millions of cattle and swine every year on so-called “disassembly lines”. This high-volume model required standardised inputs – grain and the

animals that ate it – suitable for industrial processing. This was supported by the US government, which early in the 20th century launched research programmes, tax breaks and technology drives designed to facilitate intensive agriculture – to turn every farm into a factory, as the historian Deborah Fitzgerald puts it.

All this led to the advent of factory farms after the second world war. Chickens had not previously been a staple of the American diet, but they proved to be particularly well suited to industrialisation because they reproduce quickly and their size and egg-laying capacity are easily modified through breeding. Meat companies set about creating a market for chicken meat through relentless advertising campaigns, and the factory-farming model soon spread to pigs and influenced the development of ever-larger feedlots for cattle. The environmental health scholar Ellen Silbergeld has described this as the “chickenisation” of agriculture.



A scientist displays samples of cultured meat grown in a laboratory at the University of Maastricht, 2011. Photograph: François Lenoir/Reuters

There are plenty of smart, progressive critiques of this system, but most of the suggested alternatives involve breaking up the food giants and downsizing or diversifying US farms. But antitrust policy alone won't address the harms done to animals, labour or the environment by modern

animal agriculture. Breaking up big operations could simply generate more, if maybe slightly smaller and slower factory farms. As for genuinely small farms engaged in more holistic agriculture, the theory is that they are more environmentally sustainable, protect jobs and keep local stores stocked with juicy heirloom tomatoes and humanely raised beef. But building an agricultural system around small farmers that is economically viable and can benefit most of the population could be a tall order. Many people don't want, can't afford or don't have access to organic, free-range, farm-to-fork meat and produce. What they can get are nuggets. And proponents of going small often struggle to explain how their ideas can be done on a big enough scale and at a low enough price to challenge the status quo, and in a timeframe that responds to our ongoing ecological crisis.

Meanwhile, experts on the environmental impacts of the food system mostly concur that we need to [eat much less meat](#). Some propose vegetarian and vegan diets as solutions. And even meat-inclusive proposals, like the [EAT-Lancet commission's model diet](#), recommend steep reductions, especially in the global north, and suggest a move away from the factory farming model of meat production. However, there are no signs that anything except outright bans on factory-farmed meat can achieve the required cuts – and that, for now, is a political non-starter.

This is where cellular agriculture comes in. The thing that could help solve the chickenisation of our food system is not pasture-raised hens, but mass-produced chickenless nuggets.

In 1931, Winston Churchill proclaimed that technology would one day allow humans to “escape the absurdity of growing a whole chicken in order to eat the breast or wing by growing these parts separately under a suitable medium”. As recently as the late 90s, the remark could be cited as an example of the futility of futurology. But a rapid development of biotechnology and medical science is making cellular agriculture a reality. Stem cells, the basic building blocks of most organisms, were identified in the 60s. Growing in vitro muscle tissue became possible in the 70s, and the first peer-reviewed research on the possibility of in vitro meat production was published in 2005.

For a cutting-edge biotechnology, cellular agriculture is actually a fairly straightforward process. It begins with stem cells, usually harvested from live animals via biopsy. The cells are placed in a bioreactor – a temperature- and pressure-controlled aseptic steel vat filled with a nutrient-dense growth medium that is basically a broth of sugars and proteins. Under these conditions, the cells proliferate and differentiate to form tissue. Fresh from the bioreactor, you'll have an edible, if not yet appetising substance called “wet mass”, which must then be processed in various ways to produce nuggets, ground beef and so on. Mimicking more complex cuts of meat – a filet mignon, say – requires additional techniques, such as growing muscle and fat cells on “scaffolds” made of a material such as collagen. It's structural engineering, but at a microscopic level.

The potential benefits of this technology are manifold. Most analyses of these processes suggest they would use far less land and water, and have a smaller carbon footprint, than beef and dairy. If powered with clean energy – a big but not implausible if – they could have less environmental impact than chicken and pork. It would prevent the torture and killing of billions of creatures every year, and also greatly reduce the risk of diseases spreading from animals to humans. Cellular fish could have even greater ecological benefits, through relieving pressure on endangered ecosystems and reducing the extensive pollution caused by the fishing industry.



Chickens being transported for processing in the US. Photograph: Rogelio V Solis/AP

Rendering abattoirs obsolete would also end their inherently abusive labour practices. The labour required to culture meat is highly technical and involves carefully monitoring, maintaining and adjusting bioreactors without compromising the fragile aseptic environments that cell growth requires. That's the polar opposite of fast-paced slaughter and dismemberment labour, which results in, on average, two amputations of hands, fingers, feet or limbs a week in the US. Cellular agriculture factories would offer substantially better-paying jobs than abattoirs, and would also be considerably safer and healthier work environments (albeit likely not to the same workforce).

There is a parallel push to develop [plant-based animal product alternatives](#). Given that these kind of foods can be made with existing technology and widely grown plants, and can scale up and reduce costs quickly, they are probably a better bet than cellular agriculture to challenge the conventional animal agriculture industry in the short term. The market for plant-based meat and dairy is forecast to pass \$75bn globally in the next five years, and includes faux-chicken nuggets from myriad companies, including Beyond, makers of the eponymous burger. But ultimately the companies behind them are offering artful imitations that they hope consumers will end up choosing instead of meat. Cellular agriculture produces real meat, allowing it to take the \$1tn global meat industry head-on. It does all this by “taking ethics off the table” – in the words of the Good Food Institute, an NGO that promotes alternative protein – relying on market mechanisms and appealing to consumer choice, and that could improve its chances of disrupting factory farming. It’s a moonshot that just might land.

This vision of cellular agriculture seems like just the sort of boosterism that Silicon Valley loves to inspire and exploit. To a growing number of critics, the enterprise smacks of “solutionism”, the [foolhardy belief](#) that technology can sidestep thorny social and political problems. For some scholars of technology, cellular agriculture is yet another exercise in “ecomodernist techno-optimism”. They argue that it is blind to the fact that “actual modernisation has entailed very real, and sometimes violent, effects for people and societies to be modernised”, as the Uppsala University

geographer Erik Jönsson put it. Many would prefer if everyone simply went vegan or vegetarian.

There are valid concerns that Silicon Valley and food corporations could use technologies such as cellular agriculture to tighten their control over the food supply and greenwash noxious agricultural capitalism. Current meat culturing techniques and stem cell lines are valuable intellectual property, closely guarded by armies of patent lawyers and non-disclosure agreements. Critics worry that this new industry will replicate precisely the opacity and lack of accountability of the one it aims to replace. To them, cellular agriculture embraces the worst parts of the current food regime: mass-produced, nutritionally dubious nuggets sold at homogeneous fast-food joints.

There are three responses to these challenges. The first is that the potential benefits of cellular agriculture outweigh all these costs. If the technology can dramatically diminish the production and consumption of conventional meat, even if it does so using the tools of financialised, neoliberal agri-capitalism, this is still ethically and ecologically preferable to the status quo. Incumbent meat companies such as Tyson and Cargill are not, after all, philanthropic enterprises feeding the world out of the goodness of their hearts, either. Put differently, to suggest that a world of cell meat and one of factory farms are remotely comparable is to lose all sense of perspective on the food system.

The second is that cellular agriculture, at a big enough scale, could help restructure agricultural land use by reducing demand for animal feed, thereby opening up space for more progressive food politics. If a government-financed land bank bought even a small fraction of the 320m hectares currently dedicated to feeding animals in the US, it could resell millions of acres at favourable terms for bold new uses: establishing agro-ecological and regenerative farms that are a foundation for healthier rural communities and landscapes; supporting community and worker-owned farms; providing land to people from communities that have been historically dispossessed and excluded from owning land; returning lands to tribal nations; [rewilding and conservation initiatives](#). Many of these ideas are championed by critics of cultured meat, who often suggest it is incompatible with the holistic, ecological sensibilities of slow, small and

local. But all of these ideas become *more* feasible in a world with commercially viable “labriculture”.

Finally, there’s nothing inherent to cellular agriculture technology that favours venture capital or restrictive intellectual property regimes. Those who want cellular agriculture to live up to its lofty potential shouldn’t just be worried about the malignant influence of capital – they should be finding practical ways to limit it. What’s needed is the political vision and energy to liberate this technology from the grips of corporate stakeholders, and to use it for the radical project of improving the human and animal condition around the world.



Cultured fish grown in a lab by Finless Foods being cooked at a tasting event in San Francisco, 2017. Photograph: Talia Herman/The Guardian

But if cellular agriculture is going to improve on the system it is displacing, then the critics are right: it needs to grow in a way that doesn’t externalise the real costs of production on to workers, consumers and the environment. There are serious questions about whether production can scale up safely and affordably, and some cellular agriculture practices need to be cast aside. For instance, many companies’ current production techniques, including the ones Eat Just used for its Singaporean nuggets, use [foetal bovine serum](#) as a

cell growth medium, which is harvested from the blood of cow foetuses during slaughter.

But scale may be as much a social and political question as a purely technical one. While some cellular agriculture research is being carried out at public universities with support from NGOs such as GFI and New Harvest, most research and development is being done privately. Substantial capital is needed for research, development and commercialisation. But the fact that the private sector sees potential in a technology that governments have mostly ignored is a political problem. What we need are public institutions that can nurture cellular agriculture and rein it in with public investment, regulation and licensing. It is perfectly plausible that private firms flush with venture capital will find ways to scale and sharply reduce the costs of cultured meat. But they will almost inevitably do so while maximising investor value rather than social welfare.

The challenges to achieving scale and affordability are substantial. An independent analysis for Open Philanthropy estimated that to be commercially viable, cultured wet mass would need to sell at about \$25 per kg. Current culturing techniques could put it at about \$37 per kg. This creates a paradox. Cultured meat at its current level of development is best suited to replace the most mass-produced, standardised, readily available meat: the chicken nugget. But the Eat Just nuggets were \$17 a plate, a price that would flop on the mass market, and may already have been significantly discounted for promotional purposes. Chicken nuggets are far cheaper than \$25 per kg, which is closer to what you might pay for free-range beef.

[Protein mania: the rich world's new diet obsession](#)

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Perhaps the best way to overcome these challenges is to deploy the same strategy that the US government used to industrialise farming a century ago: invest robustly in research and development through public universities, national labs and generous subsidies. Between talk of the Green New Deal and the Biden administration's ambitions for comprehensive climate crisis policy, the window for public investment in environmentally responsible technology is unusually wide. Substantial and continued government investment in cellular agriculture could be a part of whatever legislation

emerges. More broadly, governments should learn from economists such as [Mariana Mazzucato](#), who argue that mission-driven public investment in innovation is crucial to serving the public good. We are already seeing some of this sort of proactive investment and regulation in places such as Singapore and Israel.

All this could serve to lower barriers to entry into the industry, and could help with the establishment of regulations, such as a moratorium on foetal bovine serum, and industry-wide safety standards. Regulations and licensing should also require that cultured meat facilities are unionised workplaces, and that, where possible, qualified workers displaced from the conventional meat industry be given preference in hiring. Intellectual property could remain in the public trust.

Most critical visions of cellular agriculture are dystopian: unaccountable corporate giants force-feeding a captive population with fake meat. Ironically, that describes the food system we already have. A world in which the factory-farmed nugget is replaced by the bioreactor-brewed nugget would be a monumental win for animals and the environment. If tied to progressive industrial and agricultural policy, it could also be a win for labour, public investment, land use and champions of sustainable agriculture. No, this would not be a one-shot, magic bullet solution to the many ills of food production; there is no panacea. But it's a start. Chicken nuggets might represent everything that's wrong with our current food system, but cellular nuggets might just help build a more sustainable future.

A version of this article first appeared in [Logic](#), a magazine about technology

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Life and style

Mental health memes are everywhere – can they offer more than comic relief?



‘This is who I am, and here it is on a little image graphic that allows you to feel seen.’ Illustration: Sonny Ross/The Guardian

‘This is who I am, and here it is on a little image graphic that allows you to feel seen.’ Illustration: Sonny Ross/The Guardian

Relatable jokes about trauma can help people feel less alone, but questions remain over how therapeutic they can truly be



[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)

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Thu 29 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

When, more than a decade ago, I was [diagnosed](#) with post-traumatic stress disorder, I turned to the internet to learn more about my condition.

Back then, the effects of trauma weren't exactly unknown, but they weren't making headlines, either. Most of the information I found was on psychology websites, but it wasn't until I went to the doctor and received my diagnosis that I fully understood what was happening to me. Public awareness of the condition was low – or at least, it wasn't something that people spoke openly about. I felt very alone.

Fast forward to 2021 and the word “trauma” is everywhere. You’re as likely to find references to PTSD on Instagram as you are on a medical website, and mental health memes in particular have been on the increase; in fact, their preponderance has been unmistakable during the pandemic.

The most obvious example is the use of the word “triggered”, which was originally used to describe the way the brains of people with PTSD react when re-exposed to something that recalls the original trauma and puts them

in fight-or-flight mode. It has now become so ubiquitous that it's been co-opted by the political right as an example of leftwing oversensitivity – see Donald Trump Jr's book of the same name.

Though I am mostly recovered, seeing words that once were used clinically to describe my illness splashed all over the internet is certainly an adjustment – especially when they are used thoughtlessly. And with this new enthusiasm for mental health memes come questions: Does their proliferation risk watering down the terminology? Should we worry about people self-diagnosing online? And do we risk opening up the mental health conversation to cynical commercial interests?

Memes as exposure therapy

“I feel so seen,” I think, when I log into Instagram and am confronted by a meme about self-sabotage. Many accounts tend to be knowingly subversive and ironic, such as this meme from mental health meme queen @binchcity: “Being mentally ill is a full-time job and I’m getting employee of the month.”

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Others are earnest and along the lines of inspirational quotes, for example: “This isn’t anxiety. This is complex trauma,” as posted on Instagram by a “certified trauma recovery coach”. (Some of the people posting advice or encouragement range from dubious “life coaches” with little certification to licensed professionals, and the use of memes in this context has even been [called “dangerous”](#) by some.)

Some have a DIY collage aesthetic, while others are more like cartoons.

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Some strike a more serious note. Erin Taylor, a 25-year-old writer and artist from New York, runs the meme account [@atmfiend](#), which includes memes about narcissism, rape and child sexual abuse.

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“I used my meme page as an attempt to process what was going on with my life, from cutting out my father to processing childhood trauma,” she says. “The main motivation was healing myself, but I think [it] ultimately allowed others space to heal themselves, too.”

“I think it’s beneficial for people to know they’re not alone … often people don’t have friends or family talking about abuse, neglect, domestic partner violence or feelings generally,” says Taylor.

At their best, these memes help sufferers process the things that have happened to them in a safe way, helping them to confront difficult issues without being exposed or triggered – like a [visual diary](#), or even a form of exposure therapy.

‘Trauma is about shame and secrecy’

Bessel van der Kolk is laughing. I’m reading memes to the psychiatrist and best-selling author over Zoom, including one that makes reference to his pioneering book [The Body Keeps the Score](#), which explores how trauma

reshapes both the body and the brain and has been back in the bestseller charts thanks to the pandemic.

Twitter user @sydneyelainexo wrote in March: “Kindly asking my body to stop keeping the score” – a tweet which garnered 22.7k likes.

“Very good,” says van der Kolk. He says that he is too embedded in the trauma world to ask about how perceptions have changed, but likes the memes I read to him.

“Trauma is usually about shame and secrecy,” he says. “Somebody does something to you, and you blame yourself. The people who did these things to you say you’re making it up or you’re crazy, or you’re making a mountain out of a molehill. And so the way to actually deal with trauma is very much to find people who are there with you and who support you.”



Bessel van der Kolk, author of the bestselling book *The Body Keeps The Score*. Photograph: Astrid Stawiarz/Getty Images for Cracked Up

Those people may well be online, as Erin Taylor says she has found. “Obviously, I have a therapist but some aspects of healing trauma require moving past the shame you’re convinced of, so it was really liberating to tell a ton of strangers, to not give a fuck if my life felt shameful, sad, or made

others feel bad. I was just like, this is my life and this is who I am, and here it is on a little image graphic that allows you to feel a little too seen.”

“I think the only downside that can occur is when people reach out asking for help on how to change their situations, but I’m not a professional counselor,” she says. “Sometimes I’m able to offer some advice, but it’s ultimately hard not being able to do more.”

Van der Kolk is believes that anything that can help people make sense out of what they are going thorough is helpful. “The state of trauma is one of utter confusion, of having a lot of sensations or feelings, but you can’t make sense out of it. Any sentence or image that helps you to visualise what’s going on would, in principle, give you a sense of perspective. That’s a good thing to do. You go on a journey of healing.”

I ask him if he’s worried that some of the information might be inaccurate, or that reliance on internet communities might dissuade some from seeking professional help, and he is sanguine.

“I wouldn’t overestimate the capacity of professionals to know what’s right. We’re all embedded in the culture we live in. The culture of psychiatry – that’s my official profession – is very much focused on giving people the right drug, which in terms of trauma is largely not a very useful thing to do,” he says. He’s open to the idea that youth culture might actually be ahead of the curve with this, just as it is, he says, with climate change.

Humor can also be therapeutic, I say. He nods. “If people have a sense of irony, that’s very important,” he explains. “If there’s only one perspective – of ‘everything sucks and everything’s miserable’ – you cannot get out of it. So you really need to have these two perspectives living side by side.”

The internet substitutes for therapy for those without access

Lucia Osborne-Crowley, whose memoir [I Choose Elena](#) examines the legacy that a violent rape left on her physical and mental health, says she is happy the conversation is happening.

“As someone who is very interested in the study of trauma and making people more aware of it, I think it’s really great,” she says. But she is concerned that the dialogue lacks critical thinking. “It’s very strange to see it come into the lexicon in such a swift particular way, without analysis behind it.”

As with “triggered”, it’s often the case that as certain terms and ideas hit the mainstream, the original definitions are lost.

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Osborne-Crowley had to wait 12 years to get a PTSD diagnosis, and so she recognizes that the mental health meme landscape, where references to PTSD abound, could have helped her when she was younger. “Maybe if I’d seen [a meme] on Twitter when I was 15, I might have thought differently about myself and my experiences.” She might even have sought help sooner.

On the other hand, she observes, there’s a reductive “flattening” effect that doesn’t acknowledge how trauma can manifest in myriad ways depending on the sufferer – such as a focus on nightmares and flashbacks when, in her case, the effects of trauma were physical.

She notes that she was lucky to receive treatment, and says a lack of access to therapy may lead people to turn online for support and information from those who are in treatment. It isn’t fair, she argues, that you should be able to glean understanding of your condition only if you are able to pay.

Jessi Gold, an assistant professor in the department of psychiatry at Washington University School of Medicine, loves mental health cartoons. She sends me some of her favourites, which include images about depressed dinosaurs. “People worry about using humor as being degrading or bad, but I think there’s a mature and OK way of using humor,” she says. “Humor can

be bad – you can definitely make fun of mental health. I have seen that,” she says, adding: “There’s a reason humor is a mature defense mechanism.”

She is pleased to see mental health as just another topic of discussion. “I think people are more comfortable with vocally expressing things that have happened to them,” she says. “With the use of a hashtag as a movement, people realise you get a sense of community and a sense of validation.”

I ask Gold if she is worried about people self-diagnosing through memes. If someone comes to see her having self-diagnosed via the internet, she says, she’s not about to tell them that’s they’re wrong: “I’m going to say OK, let’s talk about it.”

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Gold still thinks there’s some way to go, however, in our embracing the language around mental health. It needs to go deeper. “In the US, we’ve had like 600,000 people die [from Covid] … that’s a lot of grief and pain and trauma that, if you look online, nobody’s really talking about,” she says.

“We’re more open to the idea that this has been traumatic. But I don’t think that we’ve really talked about specifics.” In other words, we have named the thing, but we are not really going beyond that to ask, how is it manifesting? And how can we heal?

Will corporations co-opt this free-form, ironic trend?

I have certainly found humor to be helpful in my own recovery, though memes less so. Like Lucie Chateau, however, I have reservations. Chateau, a PhD researcher at Tilburg University, studies digital aesthetics and the political potential of memes and is the author of the journal article [Irony](#),

Memes and Risk in Internet Depression Culture. She has been monitoring mental health images and memes for years, and has noted a shift from the romanticising of mental illness to the kinds of memes we are now talking about.

These memes often start ironically, but, Chateau says, they are given the illusion of authenticity due to their use on platforms such as Facebook. What you end up with, she says, is “people trying to promote a mental health discourse more based on resilience, and one that fits with a neoliberal idea of mental health, with recovery and accountability [framed] as the steps towards recovering from mental illness.”

In other words, it’s all about individual improvement, with no idea of the collective or of structural problems such as, for example, access to therapy.

“Ultimately, these public interactions are being held on private platforms,” says Chateau, and they are bound to be coopted. “These narratives are always going to be recuperated by the platforms where they occur, and by kind of larger discourses that are not really our own.”

She highlights the use of mental health terminology by corporate brands, such as a tweet from McDonald's suggesting that if you’re feeling “anxiety” you should order for delivery, or another from juice drink Sunny D, that adopts the tone and style of social media users tweeting about their anxiety and depression (“I can’t do this any more”).

“When you get brands and private companies coopting the language that we use to diagnose ourselves and inform ourselves, that’s what’s the most dangerous. It’s depression as a marketing tool.”

This is especially prevalent on woo-woo wellness Instagram accounts, some of which are monetised – all empty buzzwords for the purposes of commerce. You wonder how much “healing” is really being offered.

Mental health is political – the conditions of capitalism shape our psychology, just as they shape who has access to therapeutic help. The so-called BuzzFeed-ification of mental health describes how online users are increasingly splitting into “micro-identities” – so you have people with

ADHD, depression, OCD, etc defending their separate patches. It has potentially damaging implications, especially when you consider the role that peer support has played in the treatment of trauma, where working collectively is key.

Van der Kolk's work owed a lot to the feminist movement, he says – specifically women talking about their experiences. Some of that may have moved online, but can it really serve the same function when it comes to healing?

"In some ways it can offer support, but it leaves out the body," he says. "How do you comfort little babies? You rock them, you hold them. And even as adults, when something bad happens to us – that is our primary source of comfort. You don't have to talk, you don't have to explain. You can just feel ventral to ventral contact, body context, that is such a profound comforting for us as primates."

In other words, a meme may help, but it doesn't come close to a hug.

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Interview

Comedian Iain Stirling on Love Island, working with a puppet dog and his new sitcom

[Rachel Aroesti](#)



Back to reality ... Iain Stirling. Photograph: Avalon

Back to reality ... Iain Stirling. Photograph: Avalon

Narrating the hit dating show sent Stirling's career into overdrive, but in his new comedy, Buffering, the standup returns to his kids' TV roots



Thu 29 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

When Iain Stirling was working as a CBBC presenter in his 20s, he broke up with his long-term girlfriend. Unfortunately, the split occurred just hours before he was contractually obliged to go on a two-day trip to Bristol with the chronically cheerful pop duo Jedward. Later, mordantly recollecting the story in his standup – his original career before children's TV got in the way – someone from his management team told him: "Your life would be a funny sitcom."

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Almost a decade later, the prediction came true: Stirling has indeed turned his life into a funny sitcom. Buffering begins on ITV2 this week, airing after [Love Island](#), the show where he serves as a droll-yet-enthusiastic narrator. The sitcom follows a character called Iain who must navigate the routine humiliations of working in children's entertainment, all the while trying to break into what he awkwardly refers to as "adult TV". But Buffering isn't merely semi-autobiographical navel-gazing: it also revolves around the lives of Iain's flatmates – including [Jessie Cave](#)'s privileged artist Rosie and standup Janine Harouni's straight-talking Thalia (there are also scene-

stealing guest turns from [Lolly Adefope](#), [Alistair Green](#) and [Joel Dommett](#)) – meaning the show doubles as a meditation on the myriad challenges of millennial life.



Stirling stuff ... Iain and co-star Elena Saurel. Photograph: Avalon

Stirling sees Buffering as a hybrid of sitcom styles. It's a zippy, gag-dense ("because it's for ITV") studio comedy that features the sort of narrative threads you might expect to see in a gritty sadcom: the second episode ends with Iain and his on-off girlfriend (who also produces the kids' show he presents) experiencing a miscarriage. Stirling and co-creator Steve Bugeja wanted to ape the feel of the fast-paced US shows they loved such as [Modern Family](#) and [Brooklyn Nine-Nine](#), but were also determined to include more dramatic storylines that were "genuine, heartfelt and sincere. We know the perception of a sitcom coming on ITV2 straight after Love Island, so we thought: let's try and Trojan-horse some stuff in there," he says. They decided miscarriage would be an apt topic: "Me and few of the writers have gone through things like that, so we have first-hand experience."

Partly due to the agonisingly protracted process of getting a new sitcom from the page to the screen, 33-year-old Stirling is no longer the creatively frustrated man-child Buffering revolves around; earlier this year he had a

baby with the Love Island host Laura Whitmore. His wife's celebrity and the pair's association with the headline-grabbing reality show has bestowed upon Stirling a peculiar sort of fame: his personal life is now fodder for insatiable red-top clickbait. Yet he says making a show that draws on his real life actually feels like self-preservation.

"With a sitcom, the general underlying feelings and personality traits are all there so people can get an idea of me, but it can't be taken out of context, which I like," he says – unlike standup, podcasts and interviews. He singles out a joke he once made about his overdraft and shopping habits during an interview with Love Island winners Jack and Dani, which was reported as "Iain Stirling is in debt because he buys too many shoes." [No Pound Stirling, was the Sun's headline.] "You've then got your mum going: 'Do you need any money?' Oh God," he says, shuddering at the memory.



Art imitating life ... Stirling and his puppet companion in Buffering.
Photograph: Avalon

Love Island, and the tragic events that sometimes surround it, has helped make this sort of press conduct a national talking point. Stirling believes that inserting the show into discussions about online trolling and mental health is often "actually just another distraction, we should be looking to where the actual problem is".

But he also thinks the show has had a constructive effect. “What Love Island’s been great at is making people more aware that people [on social media] are human. You could be Kim Kardashian, you’re still a human being, you need to treat other human beings with respect and kindness, and not be awful to people.”

Stirling repeatedly references his own social media use, which he feels ambivalent about. He is currently Zooming from his very professional-looking “Twitch streaming room,” in which he plays Fifa for his 60,000 followers. His love for the gaming platform seems relatively straightforward. “The comedian Alfie Brown called it ‘longform social media’. You’ll stream for two to eight hours in a stint so it’s the truest representation of yourself because it’s unfiltered; you can only put on an act for so long.”

Traditional social media, however, does not carry the same positive associations. “I put my name into Twitter when I am on my own, bored and feeling a bit paranoid or lonely. If somebody says something nasty about me and saw that I’d seen it, they’d probably think: ‘Yeah that’s arrogant Stirling looking up his own name.’ Actually, I was probably just a little bit sad, and punishing myself for whatever reason.”

Stirling began his comedy career long before being in the public eye was quite so complicated. He grew up on an Edinburgh estate, and went to a “working-class, underachieving school, no exposure to the arts”, but soon became obsessed with his hometown’s live comedy circuit. He and his friend Greg would make a monthly pilgrimage to the Stand Comedy Club to see [Susan Calman](#). Trips to the festival fringe “blew my mind”, he says. In their mid-teens, the pair staged their own sketch show at the festival, titled Just So Ever Slightly (they got a good, teenage boy-heavy turnout after his sister and her friends flyered on the Royal Mile).

Stirling studied law at Edinburgh (“The only boy from my year to go to university”) and, cut off from the comedy community during an exchange year in Norway, began to write standup. He performed it on his return to the UK, and in 2009, age 21, he was runner-up for the Chortle student comedy

award (Joe Lycett won). That year, he began doing links for CBBC with a puppet called Hacker T Dog.

Nowadays, children's TV is a destination for big-name comics, with CBBC sitcoms such as *Zapped* attracting the likes of Steve Coogan. This sea-change hasn't gone unnoticed by Stirling.



Dog days ... Stirling (left) and Hacker T Dog. Photograph: Michael Mayhew/Allstar

"It's so bloody annoying! I spent years on kids' TV feeling like an idiot, then [Horrible Histories](#) and stuff happened and now everyone wants a piece of the pie," he says. He was frustrated and "a bit miserable" doing the job – "I wanted to change the world with my standup" – and, like his character in *Buffering*, struggled to get other gigs. "You'd ask to audition for a grown-up presenting job and they'd be like: 'We saw your stuff on YouTube and it's quite kids' TV.' And I'm like: yeah, I'm talking to a puppet dog."

It was *Love Island* that eventually pulled Stirling into the world of "adult TV" (almost in the raciest sense of the word), but he very nearly didn't take the job as the show only finished three days before the fringe started.

"I wasn't going to be able to preview my show, so I wasn't going to do it," he says. "But I lived with [comedian] [Phil Wang](#) at the time and he said,

‘Man, you go to Edinburgh and lose thousands of pounds to get jobs like this, so you have to do it.’ So I did it. I’m still very grateful to Phil.”

Thanks to Wang, Stirling managed to extricate himself from children’s TV and, with Buffering, has added yet another string to his bow: standup (he tours his show Failing Upwards this autumn), Twitch streamer, voiceover of the moment and now sitcom star.

He shrugs off the idea of being a proper actor – “I mean, the character’s called Iain” – but was impressed by the fact he managed to cry a couple of times, “which I didn’t know I could do”. What was his tactic for getting the tears to appear? “I just thought about really sad stuff,” he shrugs. “I put my name into Twitter and had a little read.”

Buffering begins Thursday 5 August, 10pm, ITV; all episodes will be available on ITV Hub. Iain starts touring nationwide from 14th September

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OpinionConservatives

Crime always pays for the Tories – that's why they turn to it again and again

Martin Kettle



The government's law and order crackdown displays the performative cruelty that Priti Patel has made her own



‘The so-called beating crime plan that Boris Johnson and Priti Patel announced is not about doing anything innovative, difficult or expensive.’
Photograph: Reuters

‘The so-called beating crime plan that Boris Johnson and Priti Patel announced is not about doing anything innovative, difficult or expensive.’
Photograph: Reuters

Thu 29 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

It is not difficult to see why Boris Johnson’s first post-isolation photo op was to appear alongside the home secretary, Priti Patel, and talk tough about crime. Ministers are keen to wrench the political argument towards a post-Covid domestic agenda. Yet there are fierce internal arguments in government about public spending, taxes, health and social care. What better way, meanwhile, to signal a return to supposed political normality than to reprise that old Conservative favourite, a dose of law and order?

There is also an immediate reason for that choice. July’s opinion polls have not been as good for the Tories as those of the spring. The lead over Labour, which was often double-digit in June, is mostly in single figures now, and was down from [13 points to four](#) in YouGov’s survey last weekend. The decline of the earlier vaccine bounce seems to coincide with the messy ending of England’s Covid restrictions. A crime crackdown is a way of

reassuring the voters that, whatever the appearance otherwise, the government really is in control.

Except that actually the government is not exercising control over crime. This week's package is for show. To dignify it as a real anti-crime strategy is to miss the point of it, which is rhetorical. The object of the exercise was to create headlines and to frame public debate. Johnson duly obliged with his racially freighted [remark](#) that antisocial offenders should be "out there in one of those fluorescent chain gangs visibly paying [their] debt to society". The headlines and the argument duly followed.

[Boris Johnson claims stop and search is 'kind and loving'. He's gaslighting Black people | Katrina Ffrench](#)

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In reality, the so-called "[beating crime plan](#)" that Johnson and Patel announced on Tuesday is not about doing anything innovative, difficult or expensive to address the problems of crime. It is about looking as if they are doing so. The plan is a rehash of old and existing ideas, such as more hi-vis clothing for community service offenders, electronic tagging on prison leavers and the relaxation of restrictions on stop-and-search powers, and very little else. It will not work because it has not been designed to work. It has been designed to be noticed.

The plan hasn't even been discussed with the police, which is a giveaway about its lack of seriousness or content. On Tuesday, chief constables [queued up](#) to give the Guardian's Vikram Dodd some scathing private judgments. "It is like there has been an explosion in a strategy factory," said one. The Police Federation, which represents rank-and-file officers and which last week expressed [no confidence](#) in Patel over the latest police pay freeze, dismissed the whole thing as a gimmick.

You would never guess this from the way Johnson and Patel talk about crime and the police. "This government is utterly dedicated to fighting and beating crime," Johnson announced. This is not actually true. What is true, however, is that British governments have long become addicted to doing what the American criminologist Jonathan Simon [calls](#) "governing through crime", in which the sorts of measures that Johnson and Patel announced this week –

often modest and even [pantomimic](#) by some American comparisons – are accepted as necessary responses to unacceptable public risks.

There are particular crime crises in Britain. These range from rape prosecution failures and child abuse scandals to the pandemic explosion of fly-tipping. Policing reform has also been allowed to wither on the vine. But if the Johnson government was as engaged with crime and policing as it claims, it would never have snubbed the police so conspicuously as it has done over pay, or made such deep cuts to the police and the criminal justice system more generally. Patel's [claim in the Daily Mail](#) this week that "From day one as home secretary, I've made clear that I will back the police" does not withstand scrutiny in policy terms. But it makes total sense in terms of political theatre.

['Weird and gimmicky': police chiefs condemn Boris Johnson's crime plan](#)
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Political campaigns like this are best described as performative cruelty, a policy-light approach whose central purpose is to savour the potential anguish of those it defines as threats. Donald Trump was a master of it; for him, the cruelty was all. Among all current British politicians, performative cruelty is also Patel's particular stock in trade. It is to be found everywhere in her politics: in her approach to asylum seekers in the Channel, to the penal system and to crime. It is there in her approach to officials – a charge of bullying against her was shamelessly overridden by Johnson. It was there when she was international development secretary – a department whose role she made little secret of despising.

It is a reasonable bet that a framed copy of Tuesday's Mail front page will soon be on display somewhere in her office. The headline – "Priti: I'll make yobs clean the streets" – incarnates what she aims to achieve. It shows not just that the government machine mounted an effective bid for the public's attention this week. It also shows that Patel has been granted the rare press accolade of being identified by her first name not her family name. It will certainly bolster her belief in the political rewards of performative cruelty. Where Maggie first trod, and Boris more recently followed, there now arrives, if she has anything to do with it, Priti.

Patel is not the sharpest pencil in the drawer. But she has the huge advantage of being focused on becoming Conservative leader. This singlemindedness would give her a considerable advantage if, over the coming months, the party becomes consumed with the possibility that Johnson may quit before the next general election. This is far from a certainty, and it is important not to believe every piece of gossip and to avoid wishful thinking. Nevertheless, the coming year may see the start of a leadership battle. And, in that battle, Patel will be a contender.

Patel would at present be an outsider in that contest. Her ratings among activists have declined this year compared with last. She would struggle to win as many nominations from MPs as Rishi Sunak, Sajid Javid, Michael Gove and Liz Truss. Some prejudice is also probable. But her popularity at the grassroots level is high. This week it will have got a little higher, not least because of her press support. If she has a big party conference success in the autumn, on which she will now be focused, it will rise again. Her chosen route to the leadership owes much to Johnson's own. The question is whether the Tory party of the 2020s is willing to be defined by another ambitious populist and by the performative cruelty that Patel is making her own.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist
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Amid Tory chaos and confusion, Labour has a Covid recovery plan

Rachel Reeves

The real-world impact of this government's lack of grip is all too clear, not least when it comes to the economy

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Signs of confusion. The government has not been issuing clear messages needed by business and the public. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Signs of confusion. The government has not been issuing clear messages needed by business and the public. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 29 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

The chaos and confusion caused by this government in recent weeks beggars belief. Instead of clear, calm messages for the public, we've seen ministers change their position on self-isolation within a matter of hours. And rather than timely information for businesses, companies large and small have been forced to wait until just days before all legal restrictions were lifted to get the guidance they so badly needed.

Hundreds of thousands of people are being forced to self-isolate, thanks to the prime minister's recklessness, and his refusal to keep sensible measures in place to prevent the spread of the virus.

These are difficult decisions. But no one looking objectively at this prime minister would get the sense he's a man with a plan.

The real-world impact of this government's lack of grip is all too clear, not least when it comes to the economy. The UK had the worst economic performance in the G7 last year and isn't bouncing back the way others are. The US has already reached pre-crisis levels of GDP per capita. The latest [OECD outlook](#) suggests Japan will be there in the autumn, and Germany early in the new year. The UK will not catch up until this time next year.

This week I set out five tests to ensure the government is delivering the national economy the British people deserve

Yet our economy will eventually bounce back, thanks largely to the businesses, workers and communities across Britain who have adapted in the most difficult of circumstances. As we look towards that recovery, we need to build an economy that makes the most of the huge potential we have as a nation.

We have a chance to use this time to boost growth, and to learn the lessons this pandemic has taught us about our economy, our industries and our vital public services, environment and quality of life. A [Labour](#) government will do things differently.

That's why this week I set out five tests to ensure the government is delivering the national economy the British people deserve. The economy

Labour wants to build is one where everyone has a secure job with wages they can raise a family on, a financial buffer when things go wrong, and opportunities to prosper – no matter where they’re from or what their background. These tests will help hold the government’s feet to the fire when it comes to delivering those aims.

First, our British industries should thrive. This means an expansion of manufacturing output, jobs and exports, including in high-growth sectors of the future such as green technology and digital services. Labour would do this with our plan to buy, make and sell more in Britain, building the skills and jobs of the future that will help us succeed on the global stage.

Second, people should have secure jobs and real choices around work. That means a stable income, growth in occupations that pay well but that you don’t need a degree for, and improved pay and conditions.

Third, everyone should feel the benefits of higher pay and a lower cost of living. We need a reduction in the number of households, children and pensioners in poverty, falling levels of problem debt, and higher wages so that fewer people require in-work benefits.

Fourth, no one and nowhere should miss out as the recovery takes shape. No matter where they live or what their background, everyone should be able to benefit from greater opportunities. And yet, despite Boris Johnson’s promises, the economic performance of the highest and lowest regions is forecast to widen over the course of this parliament. That cannot be allowed to happen.

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Fifth, the economic recovery must be sustainable. We need real, tangible progress towards our net zero goals, while building stronger, more resilient communities with greater wellbeing and falling rates of loneliness and social isolation.

The pandemic has hit us hard – and in more ways than one. But the problems we face as a country go back far further than the last 18 months. Under the Conservatives, in the nine years running up to the pandemic, low

growth lost us a potential £16.7bn in tax revenue. That's money that could have been spent on our NHS, supporting our teachers, or maintaining police numbers.

We face immense challenges individually, as a society, and as a country. Yet despite this government's recklessness and disregard for the concerns of ordinary people, I know we will overcome them. Labour's five tests set out a pathway to a stronger, fairer and more resilient economy where everyone can prosper – no matter where they live or what their background.

Rachel Reeves is shadow chancellor of the exchequer

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OpinionPolitics

Johnson's chain gangs plan is a hi-vis twist on a very old idea: the stocks

Joel Golby

In his shameless pursuit of crime-fighting headlines, the prime minister is pandering to voters' basest urges



Boris Johnson visits Bristol during the 2019 general election campaign.
Photograph: Frank Augstein/Pool/AFP via Getty Images

Boris Johnson visits Bristol during the 2019 general election campaign.
Photograph: Frank Augstein/Pool/AFP via Getty Images

Thu 29 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

One subject no good writer has ever had a crack at is the idea of crime; and, as a flipside to that, punishment. But finally, I am here to change that. Let's start with the bad news: [Boris Johnson](#) has said something in public again.

This was a real problem at the start of lockdown last year and through those opening, paranoia-charged weeks of it: every Monday or so, we'd all get a five-minute warning that Boris Johnson was going to be on TV, and we would all rush to assemble in our living rooms waiting for news – Are we free? Is the problem solved? Can we stop clapping yet? – and then he'd be 20 minutes late before he'd turn up looking haunted and just waffle on for a really long time and make a lot of hand gestures. Do you remember this era? It went on for months and was relentless. But weirdly the only crumb of it I can remember is the day he really slowly explained what the "["R rate"](#)" was, using illustrations.

Anyway, he's back. And after not stamping out Covid, he's now focusing on not stamping out crime. On Tuesday, at the Surrey police headquarters in Guildford, Johnson stood alongside Priti "["TikTok smirk"](#)" Patel to [launch](#) "["crime week"](#)", announcing an [extension](#) to the ever useless stop-and-search powers and, uh, a plan to make teenagers in hi-vis jackets work in graffiti clean-up [chain gangs](#).

"If you are guilty of antisocial behaviour and you are sentenced to unpaid work, as many people are, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't be out there in one of those fluorescent-jacketed chain gangs visibly paying your debt to society," [Johnson told reporters](#), "so you are going to be seeing more of that as well." Truly, we should never elect someone to high office who spent decades of their career thinking in headlines. I wonder if the country will learn this lesson before my inevitable reign of terror.

We love fighting crime in this country, don't we? We love fighting crime because we love to think of ourselves as likely victims of it. There is no person in the country more paranoid about being the victim of a crime than a high-premium home insurance customer who lives in a sleepy Neighbourhood Watch cul-de-sac and is about to go on holiday, ie 40% of the voter base. And for that reason, "I will go hard on crime!" will be a rallying cry of any prospective MP until the sun burns out of the sky.

Putting a kid with a shoplifting conviction in a high-visibility vest to pick litter on a canal doesn't really do anything to stop them from reoffending, but it does make people who think stealing electronics should be punished by bringing back hanging feel better about law and order in the abstract. I

don't have the stats on hand, because I don't think YouGov existed back then, but [similar humiliation tactics](#) famously worked very well several centuries ago, in the form of throwing rotten tomatoes at people in stocks. Which, of course, eradicated crime forever..

I can't help but feel this proposal puts a slight over-reliance on caring what neighbours and self-described "law-abiding citizens" think is an effective deterrent against someone committing a crime versus the sheer thrill (or, in most cases, necessity) of getting away with it. Which again feels like a fundamental misunderstanding of what crime is and why it happens.

['Weird and gimmicky': police chiefs condemn Boris Johnson's crime plan](#)
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Sure, yes, of course: some people do just commit crime for the love of the game. I've seen the Fast & Furious films. Sometimes it is just fun to [steal some globe-spanning cyber weapon](#) from a faceless organisation, kick someone's head in or go very fast in your car. But a fair amount of crime happens because things called poverty and deprivation exist, and the government is doing little to nothing to tackle it, and the more urgent needs for food, shelter and money take over. "Don't do crime, kids! We might make you wear a big orange jacket" is – and I am guessing! This is a guess! – unlikely to change even one person's attitude towards doing things that society deems illegal. Not even one.

But then I suppose there is the disconnect between the people in power, the people who think and the people who do. If you put the middle England voting bloc in charge of law and order – something they would lick their lips and rub their pink little hands at the prospect of – you'd find a lot of the usual methods of punishment would be replaced with archaic forms of public humiliation, and the barrier for entry of what constitutes a crime would drastically dip. ("Anyone who rides the DLR without scanning their Oyster card first has to play a little flute solo in the middle of Parliament Square while wearing Y-fronts", that sort of thing. "Teenage loiterers will be forced to do Ministry of Silly Walks-walks in front of an assembly at their school, while wearing a pointed hat that says BUFFOON on it", and so on.) And the offshore gulags they build will be filled to bursting with people who

were caught committing minor driving infractions on one of the thousands of new traffic enforcement cameras they put up.

Basically: Britain won't ever really be happy until everyone in the lower tax brackets is in prison or flogged. I'll see you either in the cells or in the stocks.

- Joel Golby is the author of [Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant Brilliant](#)
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OpinionSimone Biles

Simone Biles and the rise of the ‘great refusal’

Casey Gerald

Black public figures from Simone Biles to Naomi Osaka are helping us put one simple word at the top of our vocabulary: no



‘Some might wrongly view this refusal as a symptom of millennial dysfunction and entitlement.’ Photograph: Jamie Squire/Getty Images

‘Some might wrongly view this refusal as a symptom of millennial dysfunction and entitlement.’ Photograph: Jamie Squire/Getty Images

Wed 28 Jul 2021 14.08 EDT

I can hardly do a proper cartwheel, so I’m hesitant to opine on Simone Biles’s decision to withdraw from the Tokyo Olympics this week, telling the press and the world: “I have to focus on my mental health.” I can’t stay silent, though, because I know she’s not alone.

As a former college football player, I can imagine the psychological price Olympians pay to squeeze every ounce of greatness into a tiny window of life. As a Black man raised by a cadre of women, I can imagine the tax Black women pay because of our national commitment to “trust” them, which really just means “let them do all the work.” Or, in the case of Simone Biles, “let her put the whole country on her back”.

Faced with these burdens, however, Biles did not simply quit. She *refused*. With her bold act she stepped into a beautiful, radical, often overlooked tradition, what I call the Black Art of Escape. That tradition is how I believe we, Black people, have managed to live in a country that’s made to destroy us. We’ve been told a great deal about our people’s strategies of resistance and protest. The great Olympic example of this, of course, is Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s black-gloved Black Power salute on the medal stand at the 1968 Games in Mexico City. We’ve been told about our people’s strategies of respectability and exceptionalism, perhaps embodied best by the icon Jesse Owens, who became the first American to win four track and field gold medals at a single Olympics, a feat he accomplished while Adolf Hitler looked on.

Biles’s decision harkens to a third way Black people have survived this country: flight.

Throughout the diaspora, tales of flying Africans were shared to give hope to the enslaved, hope that no matter how their slavers treated them, no matter how their country treated them, they had a freedom on the inside that the world had not given, and the world could not take away. This folkloric tradition inspired Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon, in which Guitar tells Milkman: “Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down.”

For years we have watched Simone Biles soar through the air, across the mat, on balance beams and vaults. She’s twisted her body in ways that defy gravity, defy human comprehension. Her genius has made her the most decorated American gymnast in history, even as she’s competed with broken bones, not to mention the unconscionable abuse she endured at the hands of the former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar.

Yet, despite her many other accomplishments, I believe Biles's decision to forgo her chance at another medal in Tokyo will stand as her greatest achievement of all. That Biles, perhaps the greatest gymnast ever, on the biggest stage of all, chose herself over yet another accomplishment, gives hope to a generation of Black Americans, famous and not, that we too might refuse the terms of success our country has offered us. Now, some might say she betrayed her teammates. Betrayed her country. I say: good for her. I think back to EM Forster's great essay *What I Believe*, in which he writes: "I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country." If it takes guts to betray one's country and choose one's friend, how much more courage is required to truly choose oneself, when the whole world thinks they need you – when your team, your family, thinks they need you? But as a therapist once wisely told me: you can't give what you don't have.

America has always asked Black people to give everything we've got and then give what we don't have. And if we did not give it, it was taken wilfully – plundered, as Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote.

Biles's courageous decision echoes the actions of other Black public figures, from Naomi Osaka to [Leon Bridges](#), who are refusing to sacrifice their sanity, their peace, for another gold medal or another platinum record. They are helping us all build a new muscle, helping us put one simple word at the top of our vocabulary: no.

Some might wrongly view this refusal as a symptom of millennial dysfunction and entitlement. The truth is that many of us came of age against the backdrop of 9/11 and the pyrrhic "war on terror". We entered the workforce in the midst of the Great Recession. We cast our first votes for a Black president, only to then witness a reign of terror against Black people, young and old, at the hands of the state. (Not to mention the traumatic four years under our last president, who dispatched troops to brutalize peaceful protests for Black lives.) We are tired. We are sad. As the brilliant musician and producer Terrace Martin, perhaps best known for his work with Kendrick Lamar, told me recently: "I don't know anybody sleeping well."

I'm reminded of that great scene in the film Network, when the unstable newscaster convinces viewers all over the country to rush to their windows and scream out into the street: "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not gonna take this any more!" Might Biles's act of deep and brave self-love spark the largest wave of refusal in the history of this country? I believe it's possible.

We are, I believe, witnessing the beginning of a great refusal, when a generation of Black Americans decide to, in the words of Maxine Waters, reclaim our time. Simone Biles, famous for what she does in the air, has shown the way by standing her ground.

- Casey Gerald is the author of There Will Be No Miracles Here
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Thailand: Bangkok warehouse turned into 1,800-bed hospital as Covid crisis worsens

A cargo facility at the capital's airport will care for patients with moderate Covid symptoms as Thailand sees record cases

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Volunteers prepare to convert an air cargo warehouse into a coronavirus field hospital at Bangkok airport Photograph: Soe Zeya Tun/Reuters

Volunteers prepare to convert an air cargo warehouse into a coronavirus field hospital at Bangkok airport Photograph: Soe Zeya Tun/Reuters

Rebecca Ratcliffe in Bangkok

Thu 29 Jul 2021 01.51 EDT

A cargo warehouse at Bangkok's Don Muang Airport has been turned into an 1,800-bed field hospital, as the country struggles with its most severe outbreak since the start of the pandemic.

Hospitals in the capital Bangkok, where the outbreak concentrated, have been overwhelmed by patients, and forced to turn people away. On Thursday, the country reported a record 17,669 new cases and 165 deaths.

[Thailand puts Covid patients on sleeper trains home to ease crisis in Bangkok](#)

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Rienthong Nanna, director of Mongkutwattana Hospital, told Reuters on Wednesday that the field hospital was designed for patients with moderate symptoms.

“But if patients’ conditions deteriorate, they will be moved to our other field hospital called Pitak Rachan (Protect the King) Field Hospital,” said Rienthong, a retired major-general and an ultra-royalist leader.

He added that more field hospitals would be needed as cases rise.

Thailand’s caseload has risen from fewer than 30,000 infections at the beginning of April, to more than 540,000. Public health experts have warned that limited testing means the statistics are likely an underestimate.

The government is facing growing anger over its response to the pandemic, including over its vaccination programme, which critics say has been too slow and lacking in transparency.

Just over 5% of the Thai population is fully vaccinated.

The Thai government has been accused of relying too heavily on AstraZeneca produced domestically by Siam Bioscience, a royal owned company that has not previously supplied vaccines. A prominent opposition

politician who criticised the arrangement earlier this year was subsequently accused of breaching the country's strict lese majesty law, which can lead to 15 years in prison.

The government has also warned that it will prosecute individuals and media who spread inaccurate news, and has invoked emergency measures that outlaw sharing news that could cause misunderstanding, or that could incite fear in the public.

Six major journalist associations in Thailand have condemned the move, stating that it revealed "an intent to crack down on the freedom of expression enjoyed by the media and the public."

The teenage rapper Milli was recently charged for criticising the Thai government's management of the pandemic on social media.

This article was amended on 29 July 2021. The reference to 17,669 "new cases" had in an earlier version been inadvertently given as "deaths".

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Royal Dutch Shell

Shell boss: we have no plans to change strategy despite emissions ruling

‘Unreasonable’ court ruling does not need new strategy, Van Beurden says, as firm reveals multibillion-dollar shareholder windfall



Ben van Beurden, Shell’s chief executive, says the company will ‘continue to invest for the future of energy’. Photograph: Marika Kochiashvili/Reuters

Ben van Beurden, Shell’s chief executive, says the company will ‘continue to invest for the future of energy’. Photograph: Marika Kochiashvili/Reuters

Jillian Ambrose

Thu 29 Jul 2021 11.47 EDT

Royal Dutch Shell has no plans to change its strategy despite a landmark Netherlands court ruling calling for the company to make a 45% cut to its carbon emissions by the end of the decade, according to the oil giant’s chief executive.

Ben van Beurden denied the company would need to change its plans to meet the tougher court-ordered climate targets on Thursday, as he revealed a multibillion-dollar shareholder windfall for investors and better-than-expected quarterly profits.

Shell plans to appeal against the court's ruling, which was handed down shortly after 30% of its shareholders, including some of its biggest investors, rebelled against the board's strategy. They voted in favour of activist investors who want Shell to set firm targets to wind down fossil fuel production.

"I don't think we'll come up with a new strategy," Van Beurden said. "Our strategy is very much aligned with what the plaintiffs would want us to do, which is working on our own emissions reduction, and also helping customers reduce emissions."

Shell plans to reduce the average carbon intensity of the energy it produces by 20% by 2030, well short of the court's ruling. But Van Beurden said asking "one company" to reduce emissions by 45% when oil industry rivals and EU states plan to achieve only half these reductions over the same period is "not only unreasonable but doubly ineffective".

The oil boss also dismissed concerns over Shell's plan to help private-equity backed Siccar Point to explore for new UK oil reserves in the Cambo oilfield near Shetland, despite warnings from the International Energy Agency that the world cannot afford any new fossil fuel developments if it hopes to prevent catastrophic global heating.

"For as long as the UK still needs oil and gas in its [energy] consumption, it's better to produce in its own backyard," he said. "To import oil and gas, which would be the alternative, would obviously not serve the climate at all. Symbolically, it's not what people would like to hear. But symbolism won't help us with climate change."

The Cambo oilfield expansion could ignite a legal challenge by Greenpeace against the government on the grounds that the new exploration would undermine the UK's climate targets, and the government's recent pledge to allow new oil exploration only if it aligns with climate targets.

Van Beurden mounted his defence of Shell's ongoing fossil fuel production as the company raised its dividend by almost 40% and kickstarted share buybacks worth \$2bn (£1.4bn) and soaring global oil prices helped to fuel a sharp rise in quarterly profits.

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It reported its highest profits in two years for the three months to the end of June after a steady rise in global energy prices. Its second-quarter profits climbed to \$5.5bn from \$3.2bn in the same period last year, about 9% higher than forecast by City analysts.

Van Beurden said the company was “stepping up” shareholder distributions by increasing dividends and kickstarting share buybacks “while we continue to invest for the future of energy”. “We wanted to be really clear and signal to the market the confidence that we have in our prospects and our cashflows,” he said.

Despite the shareholder sweetener, Shell’s share price remains well below where it traded before the outbreak of Covid-19, even as oil prices have recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Despite rising on Thursday morning, the shares were up to only 1,432p, compared with 2,298p in January 2020.

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Nasa's InSight lander reveals internal structure of Mars

Analysis of marsquakes captured since probe landed in 2018 shows the Martian crust is between 12 and 23 miles thick



The dome-shaped Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure (SEIS) has recorded 733 distinct marsquakes. Photograph: Nasa

The dome-shaped Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure (SEIS) has recorded 733 distinct marsquakes. Photograph: Nasa

*[Stuart Clark](#)
[@DrStuClark](#)*

Thu 29 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Nasa's InSight lander [has revealed the depth of Mars's crust](#) and the size of its central core by using data from dozens of marsquakes captured since the probe landed in 2018.

The Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure (SEIS) is a dome-shaped instrument that sits on the surface of [Mars](#) and can pick up seismic events hundreds or even thousands of miles away. Since its deployment, the mission has recorded 733 distinct marsquakes, about 35 of which were used for the current work. All quakes registered between magnitudes 3 and 4.

Their analysis shows that the Martian crust is between 12 and 23 miles (20-37km) thick. Below this is the mantle, which extends about 970 miles down to the Martian core, which has been revealed to have a radius of 1,137 miles.

Earth's crust is also about 22 miles thick but our planet is 1.8 times larger than Mars. In terms of percentages, the Martian mantle and core are similar to the Earth's at around 45% and 54% of the planet's radius respectively.

Mars is only the third celestial object, after Earth and the moon, to have these measurements made. A key finding is that the Martian core is still molten; most scientists had assumed it would be solid.

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At least six Rohingya refugees killed as floods hit camps in Bangladesh

Shelters swept away as activists say people stuck in Cox's Bazar are highly vulnerable to the 'rapidly changing climate'

01:31

Heavy flooding hits Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh – video

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[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Thu 29 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

At least six Rohingya refugees were killed by landslides or drowned in flooding after rain inundated refugee camps in [Bangladesh](#) over recent days, deepening the despair among those living there.

Knee-deep waters coursed through the camps, battering fragile shelters made of bamboo and tarpaulin and making at least 5,000 people homeless, according to the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR).

Three children were killed, including two when their shelter collapsed, a Save the Children spokesperson said.

"They had to flee their shelters with nothing, they just took what they were wearing because the water was flooding so quickly," said Yasmin Ara, founder of the [Rohingya](#) Women Development Forum. "They need some financial support, food and clothes, because they have nothing to wear and also they are not getting medical support."

UNHCR said emergency teams had been deployed to assess damage and relocate families, while the first responses came from 3,000 trained Rohingya volunteers.

The flooding has affected large parts of the [Kutupalong refugee camp](#), which has existed since the early 1990s but was expanded on uneven, landslide-prone terrain in 2017, when it [became the world's largest refugee camp](#) for the 700,000 Rohingya escaping military massacres in Myanmar, called "[genocidal](#)" by the UN.

More than 2000 shelters have been flooded and many of the children are missing. [@shafiu](#) [@jessica_olney_1](#) [@RapporteurUn](#) [@poppymcp](#) [@YangheeLeeSKKU](#) [@RefugeesIntl](#) [@d_fullerton](#) [@spasha13](#) [@CoalitionCanad1](#) [@BobRae48](#) pic.twitter.com/PzfgCGwbSr

— Education for Rohingya Children (@EducationForRo) [July 27, 2021](#)

Campaigners have warned every year that seasonal rains and cyclones in Bangladesh pose a major threat to the refugees, who live in cramped conditions with little protection from the weather and no access to storm shelters.

The Norwegian Refugee Council said 300 landslides had been documented, leaving roads submerged and bridges damaged, and 14,000 refugees living in waterlogged shelters, but that number was likely to increase.

After repeated lockdowns, recent coronavirus outbreaks and a major fire that left [48,000 people homeless in March](#), there is a sense among refugees that they are being forgotten.

“The responsible people, the site management and NGOs are not working properly. It’s not just one year, this is the previous three years this is happening and we’re facing the same thing again and again,” said Khin Maung, founder of the Rohingya Youth Association. “The last two nights, people can’t sleep. It’s like we’re living in a river, not on land.”

The Rohingya have said they will go back to Myanmar only when their safety is assured and they are given citizenship, but the prospect of a return has seemed even more distant since the [military coup](#) in February.

“How much should we Rohingya have to endure? The Rohingya first suffered genocide, then massive fires in the refugee camp, and now massive flooding in Cox’s Bazar. As a refugee, I see my life completely overtaken by shadows,” said Mohammed Nowkhim, a refugee activist.



Rescuers carry umbrellas as they search for survivors after heavy rains caused a landslide in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, 27 July 2021. Photograph: Shafiqur Rahman/AP

The pandemic has restricted access to the camps but aid work has also been hampered by consecutive years of falling donations, with less than a third of this year's funding target met.

[UK accused of ‘abandoning’ Rohingya with ‘catastrophic’ 40% aid cut](#)

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The UK was accused in May of “abandoning” the Rohingya with a 40% aid cut.

“The floods are a window into how vulnerable refugees, and the community that hosts them, are to a rapidly changing climate. At a time of acute need, funding has continued to decline. Donors, we have been told, are fatigued. The cost of that indifference can be measured in human lives,” said Jamie Munn, director of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Bangladesh.

“Sadly, it is a sign of our times; we are accustomed to conflicts, displacements and the climate crisis cycling through our news and through the attention of the international community, including donors.”

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[China](#)

China ‘propped the doors open’ for criminals in Microsoft hack, Australian spy agency boss says

Rachel Noble said the Chinese government’s actions ‘crossed a line’ as she spoke at an inquiry on proposed cyber laws



‘It’s an attack at a scale that is extremely large and significant.’ Rachel Noble, the head of the Australian Signals Directorate, has spoken at a parliamentary inquiry on the massive Microsoft Exchange hack earlier this year. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

‘It’s an attack at a scale that is extremely large and significant.’ Rachel Noble, the head of the Australian Signals Directorate, has spoken at a parliamentary inquiry on the massive Microsoft Exchange hack earlier this year. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

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Thu 29 Jul 2021 05.14 EDT

Australia’s top cyber spy says China’s actions in the hack of [Microsoft Exchange email server software](#) were akin to propping open the doors of thousands of homes and leaving them ajar for criminals to get inside.

Rachel Noble, the director general of the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), drew the analogy as she said the Chinese government’s actions had “crossed a line”, prompting the Australian government to join with the United States and other countries to [publicly point the finger at Beijing last week](#).

Such “reckless actions should not be tolerated”, added the home affairs secretary, Michael Pezzullo.

The pair appeared at a parliamentary inquiry on Thursday as the Morrison government seeks support for proposed legislation to place extra requirements on the critical infrastructure operators to toughen up their cyber defences.

[Australia joins allies in accusing China of ‘malicious cyber activities’](#)
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They were asked about the Australian government’s statement declaring that Canberra had “determined that China’s ministry of state security exploited vulnerabilities in the [Microsoft](#) Exchange software to affect thousands of computers and networks worldwide, including in Australia”.

“To describe it in plain language, it would be like houses and buildings had faulty locks on the doors,” Noble said.

“When the Chinese government became aware of those faulty locks on the doors, they went in and they propped all those doors open.

“What then happened was that there was opportunity for all sorts of criminals [and] other state actors – you name it – to pour in behind all those propped-open doors and get into your house or your building.

“It’s that action, from a technical point of view, which crossed a line in the judgment of policy agencies in governments around the world.”

Noble said it was estimated that there were about 70,000 businesses and organisations in Australia using a Microsoft Exchange server.

“So it’s an attack at a scale that is extremely large and significant.”

She said it was “certainly our operational experience that state actors along with criminals can look awfully similar in terms of their behaviour in cyberspace”.

Pezzullo said Australia believed states should show restraint in cyberspace, avoiding reckless or malicious actions.

“If you pry open all the doors, if you pry open all the windows, if you in effect disable all of the burglar alarms, we’re all going to be affected,” Pezzullo said.

“Such reckless actions should not be tolerated as a matter of international and global norms, and that’s why the Australian government joined with such a significant coalition of free democratic nations.”

The Chinese embassy in Canberra last week dismissed the Morrison government’s statement on the Microsoft Exchange matter as “groundless”.

The embassy said it was a case of Australia “following the steps and parroting the rhetoric of the US”, while arguing Australia had “a poor record” as “an accomplice for the US’s eavesdropping activities”.

The Australian parliament’s joint committee on intelligence and security is reviewing a government bill that would impose new cyber security

obligations on a range of critical sectors.

These sectors include communications, financial services, data storage, defence industry, universities and research, health care, space technology, transport, and water and sewerage.

[‘An attractive market’: policy vacuum on ransomware attacks leaves Australia vulnerable](#)

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There will be mandatory reporting of serious cyber security incidents to ASD.

The bill gives government agencies new powers to respond to major attacks, including obtaining information from an affected business or entity. Australian entities under attack could also be directed to “do, or refrain from doing, a specified act or thing”.

Pezzullo played down concerns from industry about the new rules being overly onerous, arguing the government’s first preference was to work cooperatively with businesses and organisations to strengthen their defences.

He said the new measures, while potentially “far reaching”, were needed “as a last resort in a national emergency, should an entity be unwilling or unable to do what is necessary”.

During Thursday’s hearing, officials were also quizzed about the readiness of security agencies to protect Australia’s electoral systems from potential cyber attacks.

“If something were to occur, we would immediately know, as would other intelligence agencies, and then be working in real time to try and address any incident with a view to try and get the system back up and running to keep the election going, and then deal with the issues of ‘whodunnit’ after that,” Noble said.

Pezzullo added: “It helps that we’re still on paper and pencil [with electoral ballots]. This is one of those cases where not being digital helps.”

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