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[Opinion](#)[Hong Kong](#)

I covered Hong Kong for decades. Now I am forced to flee China's 'white terror'

[Steve Vines](#)

After 35 years, the Observer's former correspondent is leaving as what was once a haven of liberty and peace is transformed into a police state



Illustration: Dominic McKenzie/The Observer

Illustration: Dominic McKenzie/The Observer

Sun 8 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

When I arrived in [Hong Kong](#) in 1987 as the *Observer*'s south-east Asia correspondent, the foreign editor said he saw it as being a base, not the kind of territory that would generate much news but it was a safe place to be, communications were good and I was unlikely to have any visa problems. I thought I might stay a couple of years and move on. Thirty-five years later, I have, with great sadness, moved on and no one in their right mind can possibly assert that Hong Kong is a safe place for journalists.

The white terror – the term used to describe the ruthless elimination of the opposition in Taiwan following the imposition of Kuomintang rule and more recently taken up by the opposition in Hong Kong to describe similar events in the city – is relentless, swooping down not just on journalists, but on prominent opposition leaders, teachers, lawyers and, recently, [speech therapists](#) who had the temerity to write a children’s book about sheep that dared to answer back; they have been charged with subversion.

It was famously said that Hong Kong was the only part of China where no citizen need fear the midnight knock on the door by the secret police. Things have changed: Hong Kong’s newly formed national security police division prefers the dawn raid to midnight arrests, but what has changed more substantively is that the Chinese Communist party’s infamous means of control are becoming routine in a place where liberty had been the norm. More than 10,000 people have been [arrested](#) for political offences, a staggering number in a population numbering just over 7 million. The election system has been undermined; even the banks have been complicit in freezing the accounts of dissidents. There has been a widespread purge of teachers and teaching materials and, closer to home for me, the media have become prime targets for suppression. Even support for the unusually successful Hong Kong team at the Tokyo Olympics has been the subject of criticism by those intent on currying favour with the masters in Beijing, who are only interested in team China.

The judiciary, whose independence has been a cornerstone of Hong Kong’s success as a global business centre, is being transformed. Judges in national security cases are hand-picked by the head of government, the constitutional right to [trial by jury](#) has been abolished and mind-blowing sentences are being doled out to those found guilty of politically related crimes.

Apologists for the crackdown say that it would never have happened had Hongkongers not [dared to challenge](#) the world’s biggest dictatorship by pouring on to the streets in their millions in 2019. For months, the protests dictated the news as government officials retreated to their fortified offices, leaving the police to take control. The truth is that China was never comfortable with relinquishing control and didn’t need much of an excuse to renege on promises of autonomy for Hong Kong.

As someone who has not only been a journalist but also founded several businesses in Hong Kong, it seemed to me that this place had a unique ability to bounce back and survive the fiercest of storms. The realisation that, at least in the near term, this resilience has been decisively crushed made me contemplate the previously unthinkable – leaving.

Can Hong Kong survive this rampage obliterating the remnants of liberty? The answer is almost certainly no, unless survival is seen through the eyes of China's rulers who really do not care whether Hong Kong remains as an international business centre. They don't care because they think that Shanghai can do the job much better and is not tainted by Hong Kong's colonial past.

The rulers are not bothered by the mounting exodus of people from Hong Kong because, as they point out, there are plenty of people on the mainland to replace them. Indeed, this policy of replacement is one widely seen in other “restive” regions of China, notably Xinjiang and Tibet, where the local population has been overwhelmed by [Han Chinese](#) from other parts of the country.

The worst of the local sycophants, who are jumping that bit higher to please their masters in Beijing, are meanwhile busy advocating the suppression of Cantonese, a language with deeper historical roots than Mandarin, now officially called Putonghua (the common people's language). They have successfully advocated greater censorship of films and theatre to purge them of unduly Hong Kong-oriented content and, like all apologists for authoritarian rule, they are obsessed with symbolism, deeply worried over how the national flag is raised and sleepless over the idea that Hong Kong's regional flag might be seen flying higher than the five-star red flag.

As a presenter of the last surviving current affairs TV programme produced by Radio Television Hong Kong, the public broadcaster, I had the misfortune to witness the growing censorship at first hand. A new director of broadcasting was [installed](#), who brought in a stratum of commissars who censored our programme at the planning stage, as soon as filming began and sometimes made cuts minutes before going to air. There were so many red lines to be observed that, as one commentator put it, they more closely resembled the Red Sea.

In the past, people fled the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong in tiny boats; now the flow has reversed. Heartbreakingly, 12 young people were caught and given [heavy punishment](#) for trying to reach Taiwan. A prominent online media organisation has just announced that it is [quitting Hong Kong](#) to find refuge in Singapore – yes, the same Singapore where media censorship was the stuff of stories I used to file for the *Observer*.

With the tide turning so rapidly, my departure hardly matters, but it is carried along by waves that are rising by the day.

Steve Vines has reported from Hong Kong for the Observer and other news organisations since 1987 and is the author of Defying the Dragon: Hong Kong and the World's Largest Dictatorship

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The Observer view on the Tokyo Olympics

[Observer editorial](#)

From the courage of Simone Biles to Tom Daley's knitted medal cosies, the spirit of these uniting Games has shone bright



Katie Archibald and Laura Kenny celebrate winning gold in the women's madison at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Photograph: DPPI/Photo Kishimoto/LiveMedia/REX/Shutterstock

Katie Archibald and Laura Kenny celebrate winning gold in the women's madison at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Photograph: DPPI/Photo Kishimoto/LiveMedia/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 8 Aug 2021 01.30 EDT

The unifying spirit that characterised the 2012 London Olympics has too often seemed a distant memory in the fractured political years since. In the past few weeks, however, out in the closely policed Tokyo bubble, symbolic elements of that spirit have shown themselves alive and well.

An unusually united kingdom has once again proved itself capable of coming together to be greater than the sum of its parts, drawing collective excellence from all its counties and regions and nations, showcasing a levelling up of south and north, urban and rural, setting standards in everything from the extraordinary niceties of the [dressage](#) to the wild ride of [BMX](#).

No Olympics has ever arrived with less fanfare than this one. These were Games that hardly anyone believed should go ahead – beyond the Japanese organising committee with its £18bn bill, and the athletes who had waited five years for their shot at gold, or their opportunity to say “I was there”.

But while the pandemic has made the event a unique effort in caution and control, the action, as ever, has been all about thrilling risk and emotional release. Perhaps our months of relative confinement have made that display of all-or-nothing energy more affecting. It used to be the marathon that was the heartbeat of the Olympic movement. These days, to British eyes at least, it has become the triathlon that first stirs the blood and has a nation setting its alarm clocks. There was [only one Brownlee on show this time](#), but the brothers' legacy was felt in the collective triumphs of the relay quartet.

As in 2012, the implications and potential of such displays of national team spirit, an all-inclusive and joyful patriotism, have not always found favour in predictable quarters. The ludicrous Sir Digby Jones felt his experience was

spoiled by the [proud Tower Hamlets consonants of Alex Scott](#), eloquently anchoring the BBC coverage alongside Clare Balding, and keeping up a winning smile for a fortnight. John Redwood [bemoaned](#) the fact that he couldn't just sit down and cut to the chase of winner-takes-all competition, without a preamble exploring the long emotional journey that got an athlete near a podium. His criticism not only exposed the limitations of his empathy but a misunderstanding of the fact that authentic glory is only ever about sacrifice.

Simone Biles, to many the greatest athlete on show, proved you could be an inspiring champion not only by pushing the limits of human possibility but by showing your vulnerability and fear in the pursuit of that goal (rarely can a bronze medal have warmed more hearts than the [one Biles gained from her final humbling efforts on the beam](#)).

More than previous Games, perhaps, and at the end of a year when almost every family on the planet has had to make sacrifices, the BBC coverage of events in Tokyo revealed just how human the anxieties inside these superhuman bodies were. Cycling gold medallist Laura Kenny, still giggling as much as she did in 2012, has proved herself the [steeliest competitor in British women's Olympic history](#), but that didn't stop her crumbling every time someone mentioned her son, Albie, from whom she had been so long separated.

These were Games that opened up a new parity of competition for men and women, in hugely successful experiments with mixed events. Tom Daley also proved once and for all that there is no single blueprint for male sporting heroism or Olympic families. His two medals were separated by a [cardigan's worth of knit and purl](#), and joyously celebrated by his husband and son back home.

There have been times when it seemed Olympic sport would go the way of other sports, and be more about cynicism than grace, contracts than courage. Even in the absence of crowds, however, there have been plenty of moments in these Games that have shown the original flame still flickers. And only three years to wait until Paris.

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[Opinion](#)[Ebrahim Raisi](#)

The Observer view on what Iran's new president means for the Middle East

[Observer editorial](#)

Ebrahim Raisi is another hardliner, but western leaders must engage with him to cool the tensions threatening the region



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, left, gives his official seal of approval to Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran, Iran on 3 August. Photograph: AP

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, left, gives his official seal of approval to Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran, Iran on 3 August. Photograph: AP

Sun 8 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

A hardline president has taken charge in Iran. An inexperienced government in Israel is [threatening military action](#) against Tehran. A lethal shadow war is being waged in the Gulf. Iran's ally, Hezbollah, is firing missiles into Israel from chaotic Lebanon. Bitter words fly in London over hostage-taking. US fears grow, meanwhile, that the Vienna nuclear talks have failed. Deal or no deal, it's suggested, Iran may soon be able to build an atomic weapon.

This is a perilous, darkly portentous moment in the Middle East and specifically for the multifaceted conflict between Iran and the west. Ebrahim Raisi, who was sworn in as president on Thursday after a rigged, boycotted election, offered [scant ground for optimism](#). "Tyrannical" sanctions imposed by Donald Trump, which have ravaged the country since 2018, must be lifted, he said. But he offered no plan to achieve it and nothing in the way of concessions.

Raisi's ascent marks a definitive triumph for the fiercely conservative, anti-western factions associated with Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Raisi's predecessor, Hassan Rouhani, like Mohammad Khatami before him, fought a long, ultimately losing internal battle for rapprochement with the US and Europe. Now, hardliners control all the Islamic republic's main institutions, including the military, judiciary and parliament.

The implications of this clean sweep are ominous. Backed by the ever more influential Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Raisi, ironically, now has the clout to cut a deal in Vienna that Rouhani lacked. He may do so. Iran's economy is in dire straits. Inflation and shortages are wreaking havoc. Official figures show the poverty rate doubled over two years, to 30% in 2019. It may be [even worse](#) now. A limited agreement on sanctions relief could ease the public's pain.

But Raisi and the ageing, hawkish Khamenei remain ardent nationalists who believe strongly, on ideological and religious grounds, in the virtues of self-reliance. They argue that, in future, Iran's centrally directed economy, increasingly dominated by IRGC interests, should not depend on private sector trade and business with a US-dominated west. They aim to eliminate forever the political leverage that sanctions afforded Washington. They don't want to be [friends with America](#).

Freed from the restraints previously exercised by the vanquished “moderate” opposition, Raisi’s insistence on increased self-reliance also presages an expansion of Iran’s regional sway, not least by reinforcing the “axis of resistance” with allies and proxies in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon. Likewise, closer strategic alliances with China and Russia are in prospect. Tehran [recently signed](#) a 25-year trade and military partnership with Beijing. Always quick to spot an opening, Vladimir Putin heartily [congratulated](#) Raisi on his election.

The Gulf [drone attack](#) on the Israel-linked tanker MV Mercer Street, which killed a Briton and a Romanian last week, augurs ill for the Raisi era. As always, Iran denies responsibility. Britain and the US say they can prove otherwise. Tehran’s suspension of talks on an international prisoner swap is another blow, as is the shocking [10-year jail sentence](#) given to a British-Iranian, Mehran Raoof. Richard Ratcliffe, husband of unjustly imprisoned Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, is right to [raise the alarm](#). Foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, must do more.

Alarming, too, is the sudden [outbreak of hostilities](#) across the Israel-Lebanon border and now with Hamas in Gaza. Hezbollah, unusually, has admitted launching missiles. This declaration looks like a message for [Naftali Bennett](#), Israel’s untested prime minister, sent with Iran’s approval. After the tanker attack, Israel threatened direct military action. Such a contest between new guys Raisi and Bennett is something the Middle East cannot afford.

Concern grows in Washington, meanwhile, that smouldering conflicts involving Tehran and other regional actors, fanned by the changes of leadership in Iran and Israel, could ignite. Earlier this year, there was talk of an easing of tensions between Iran and its arch-rival, Saudi Arabia. Officials from the two sides met in Baghdad. All that has gone out of the window now. The Saudis [snubbed](#) an invitation to Raisi’s inauguration. Back to square one.

The Biden administration also has [worries of its own](#). It pinned its hopes of defusing tensions with Iran on reviving the 2015 nuclear pact that was petulantly [abandoned](#) by Trump. It’s chastening to reflect that his foolish decision did as much as anything to assure the ascent of Raisi and the hardliners and the discrediting of Iran’s reformists. Now, US analysts

suggest that, even if there's a compromise and the pact is reinstated, it's already too late. Iran, they suspect, has gained so much bomb-making know-how in the meantime that the nuclear cat, figuratively speaking, is out of the bag.

This thought understandably gives Israeli leaders nightmares. It should also worry the region and not-so-distant European neighbours. But further chest-beating, sabre-rattling and proxy war-fighting is not the way to respond. The [EU sent](#) a representative to Raisi's inauguration. That was the right thing to do. At this perilous juncture, the US and Britain, too, must strive ever more urgently to keep the door open and advance dialogue with Tehran. For his part, Raisi should stop posturing and show a bit of statesmanship by immediately releasing all the western hostages.

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NotebookCoronavirus

We put our shirt on French holiday roulette and the wheel stopped on... amber

Rachel Cooke



It's been a white-knuckle ride, but we're finally off to France subject to our Covid 'declaration of honour'



Booking a house in rural France required nerves of steel. Photograph: Stefano Politi Markovina/Alamy

Booking a house in rural France required nerves of steel. Photograph: Stefano Politi Markovina/Alamy

Sat 7 Aug 2021 12.27 EDT

Like many people, I've spent a lot of this year playing the great new game of holiday roulette, a wild ride that began for me in January, when a group of us, convinced that foreign travel would be possible again by the summer, booked a house in rural France. So many times, we almost cancelled. So many times, I wondered if our nerve would hold. On Thursday, however, our uncommon steeliness/wilful stupidity paid off. France [returned to the amber list](#). Time for the casino to pay up.

Only then a new game began: the struggle to organise all the stuff you now need to cross international borders. The French government's requirement that [travellers sign a “declaration of honour”](#) promising they have no Covid symptoms makes me laugh; it reminds me, somehow, of the notes small children write, in which they sombrely announce to their parents that they'll “tidie my bedroom soon” or do their homework “if I can have a Nintendo Switch”. But the business of booking Covid tests is the opposite of funny. While there are hundreds of “government-approved” companies out there, it

seems that many turn out to be strangely uncontactable when their kits fail to turn up. In the end, I went with the site with the most vaguely scientific-sounding name and was duly rewarded with a surprisingly warm email from “Dr Tom Stubbs and the Chronomics team”. Fingers (and test tubes) crossed.

The longue view



Les Arcs, the French ski resort designed by Charlotte Perriand. Photograph: Annie Green-Armytage/Alamy Stock Photo

I was longing to see Charlotte Perriand: The Modern Life [at the Design Museum](#). If Perriand is best known for her collaborations with Le Corbusier and Fernand Léger, she'll always have a place in my heart as the architect of Les Arcs, the 1960s ski resort that is the real star of *Force Majeure*, Ruben Östlund's thrilling 2014 film about avalanches and marital discord. But walking around it, I was disappointed. It's so hard to make design work in museums. While paintings are inevitably at their best in galleries, chairs and tables rarely are. There's something stultifying about design shows; all the talk of form and function, when all the visitor really wants to do is to whip off their shoes and lie down in that classic chaise longue.

Still, one thing did make me smile. Architects of a certain vintage tend not to be known for larking about; you don't look at Trelllick Tower as you pass it on the train into Paddington and think "wow, the guy who came up with that must have been a hoot", and according to those who knew Erno Goldfinger, he absolutely wasn't. In the exhibition, though, is a brief letter to Perriand from Goldfinger – they were then both in their 60s – across which he has drawn, in red pen, a love heart, complete with arrow and dripping blood. The old flirt.

Lacking in novelty



'Fergie won't be put in a box': the Duchess of York on the Lorraine Tv show. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/REX/Shutterstock

Given that there is now just one programme on BBC Radio 4 devoted to reviewing the arts, you'd imagine *Front Row* would have better things to do than talk to the Duchess of York about her Mills & Boon novel. But, no. On Thursday, it treated us to an [interview of quite unparalleled inanity](#) with the proud author of *Her Heart for a Compass*. Among its revelations were the fact that the book is "a work of fiction" and that she is a "director rather than a scribe" (translation: she had help writing it) whose middle name is "cinematographer". Impossible not to notice, too, that the duchess talks

about herself in the third person (“People try to put Fergie into a box”) with a frequency that borders on the alarming.

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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Observer comment cartoon

Boris Johnson

The liar, the witch and the wardrobe – cartoon

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Allegra Stratton leads by example in saving the world... she doesn't fancy it just yet

[Catherine Bennett](#)



If the PM's climate spokesperson is in no rush to go electric, then why should we bother?



‘Had Stratton’s diesel embarrassment been a one-off it might not have secured her a place in the PR hall of fame.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

‘Had Stratton’s diesel embarrassment been a one-off it might not have secured her a place in the PR hall of fame.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 8 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

‘I don’t fancy it just yet,’ said [Allegra Stratton](#), the No 10 press secretary turned prime minister’s climate spokesperson, when she was asked about getting an electric car. She preferred her old diesel, thank you.

If this was merely the most memorable in a series of suboptimal comments from the person hired to communicate the urgency of Cop26, the climate summit, you couldn’t fault it as a summary of Boris Johnson’s position on decisive climate action. He doesn’t fancy it just yet.

Indeed, if Johnson ever pictured the UK’s hosting of this session as more significant than an extended posturing opportunity, he would hardly, earlier, have identified the home team as a perfect depository for spare or discarded staff and even ([according to Dominic Cummings](#)) as a usefully time-consuming distraction for his now wife. Last week, it belatedly entered

Johnson's head, by way of concealing some recent incivility, to offer Nicola Sturgeon a starring role at Cop26 (he'd forgotten saying she shouldn't be "[anywhere near](#)" the proceedings, in Glasgow).

If anyone involved in Stratton's climate redeployment did attempt to brief her on the unfamiliar territory, it evidently did not extend to suggesting a review of her own arrangements, lest through any example of exceptional ignorance or entitlement she exposed the government's climate messaging to ridicule. Though had Stratton's diesel embarrassment been a one-off (or explained by something more persuasive than her children's toileting needs), it might not have secured her a place in the PR hall of fame alongside jeweller Gerald Ratner's immortal (on one of his products) "[it's total crap](#)".

Alas, Stratton's "I don't fancy it just yet" came only days after she'd urged civilians to attempt "micro-steps" that will, assuming a lifestyle not unlike her own, make them, too, [One Step Greener](#). Although her top tip – "Did you know, you don't really need to rinse your dishes before they go in a dishwasher?" – is likely to become a classic, there were strong contenders on planet saving via bread (had anyone else discovered not letting it go mouldy?) and ecological know-how: "Does your brand of plastic bottle shower gel come as a bar in cardboard packaging?"

"I bet it does," Stratton persisted, presumably confident that the sort of people who've never heard of soap would be unlikely to suggest there are more pressing actions, pre-Cop26, let alone recall that her employer has the environmental rectitude of an urban fox.

We can't be certain, admittedly, that Stratton hasn't tried the Johnsons with some bespoke tips on being One Step Greener. It wouldn't be hard. "Did you know you don't really need to [entirely refurbish](#) an inoffensive company flat with insanely vulgar new wallpaper and sub-colonial effects? I bet you don't!"; "Save on [Daylesford packaging](#): try cooking your own meals!"; "Think – do you really need that [new boat](#)?"; "Impress visitors by using a pre-loved space for briefings instead of splurging £2.6m on that '[modern press facility](#)'!" She might have added that the biggest challenge facing humanity is, according to one distinguished Cop26 attendee, overpopulation: "It is time we had a grown-up discussion about the optimum quantity of human beings in this country and on this planet."

This fertility-phobic savant is, of course, the father of seven or so, Boris Johnson; though [writing in 2007](#), when he'd only contributed around four additional Johnsons to a problem that threatened, he warned, to hideously overwhelm the planet: "You have a horrifying vision of habitations multiplying and replicating like bacilli in a Petri dish." So, practise contraception? Nah. He doesn't fancy it just yet.

Supposing a reformed Stratton addressed her habit of patronising people who, deliberately or not, have a smaller carbon footprint than members of her own circle, her legacy in trivialising action on the climate emergency and in depicting it as fully as upsetting to libertarians as to the impoverished may already be difficult to reverse. Among those last week applauding her defiant "I don't want anybody to be telling me tomorrow that I need to spend thousands on a new car" was – writing in the same paper where she'd cast doubt on plate-rinsing – [Bjørn Lomborg](#), the prominent "sceptical environmentalist". He congratulated her for so capably undermining the official government message. "Maybe we are better off looking at what climate spokespeople like Ms Stratton do."

A prime minister who was serious about Cop26 might at this point concede, even if it recalled the [unedifying circumstances](#) of Stratton's original appointment, that it's probably unhelpful for a climate spokesperson to compromise the summit's president, Alok Sharma's pronouncements about its "[particular urgency](#)", yet more so actively to reinforce public complacency.

But as Johnson's [coal mine gag](#) reminds us amidst lethal floods, [record temperatures](#) and forest fires, Stratton is merely amplifying his own climate preferences: performance over policies, every time. The chair of the climate change committee, Lord Deben, recently [warned against](#) this procrastination: "If all we do is promise, other people will not take us seriously... it puts the whole process [of Cop26] into jeopardy."

That was before the climate spokesperson followed up her dishwashing hints with the assurance that One Step Greener is compatible with taking unlimited flights to, say, Cornwall, [Mustique](#), a family place in [Greece](#). "In terms of individual choice, the prime minister believes in it fundamentally," she affirmed. "And people should make their own informed, educated

decisions about where they go on holiday and how they go on holiday.” China, India and Russia probably feel much the same way about fossil fuels.

Is it too late then to contain Allegra Stratton? Or at least shift to a quieter, hybrid version before she sets fire to the entire summit? Even if Sharma’s rhetoric could mitigate the impact of her recent contributions it will take more than words to prevent Stratton’s catchphrase defining the UK’s response, under Johnson, to a planetary emergency: I don’t fancy it just yet.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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Names in the newsPatti Smith

Words don't fail Patti Smith. That's why she is still my superstar

Rebecca Nicholson



The singer outshone her modern rivals in a survey of the vocabulary of lyrics



Because the night belongs to her: Patti Smith in Alba, Italy on 10 July.
Photograph: Roberto Finizio/Getty Images

Because the night belongs to her: Patti Smith in Alba, Italy on 10 July.
Photograph: Roberto Finizio/Getty Images

Sat 7 Aug 2021 12.30 EDT

A recent study by the online search tool [Wordtips](#) assessed the number of unique words used in the lyrics of 100 music “legends” and 100 modern pop stars. (Rappers were excluded as they had their own survey a few years ago and the result showed that they are, to use the scientific term, extremely wordy.)

It found that [Patti Smith](#) has the largest vocabulary, clocking up 217 unique words per 1,000, more than her closest rivals in lyrical complexity, Joni Mitchell and Björk. Smith was a writer and a poet before she was a rock star, so it is perhaps unsurprising that she has an interest in the more curious corners of language.

All three women have the kind of lyrics that can make it feel as if the ground is shifting beneath you, finding a slanted way into a universal sentiment. I often think of Björk’s Alarm Call, an ode to pure joy: “I’m no fucking Buddhist, but this is enlightenment”, or Mitchell’s A Case of You, if not the greatest song about love and pain of all time, then certainly the one with the best lyrics. And there is no better opening line than “Jesus died for somebody’s sins but not mine”, in which Smith took the bones of a Van Morrison cover and pressed them into music folklore. Complexity is a preference, however. I love Joanna Newsom, for example, and will contentedly listen to a 12-minute song about birds and constellations that manages to squash in the word “[Pleiades](#)”, though a quick search of lyrics.com suggests that it is not as rare as you’d think and the Red Hot Chili Peppers also got a Pleiades into [Can’t Stop](#).

At the same time, I know plenty of people of excellent taste who’d still rather plug their ears than sit through one of her albums. Many of the greats hovering around the bottom of the list, who use the fewest unique words, are not exactly short of a classic or 20 or 50: John Lennon, James Brown,

Aretha Franklin and even our lord and saviour Dolly Parton tend to stick to more familiar words. I suppose it's hard to better "I love you".

They don't make 'em as verbose as they used to. The current pop star with the biggest vocabulary is Billie Eilish, with 169 unique words per 1,000, even though arguably her best lyric is "duh". She is closely followed by Harry Styles, Lizzo and Shakira and if they miss an opportunity and choose not to form a wordy supergroup, then I would very much like to see them in a Scrabble league instead.

Selena Gomez: losing the plot on late-stage celeb culture



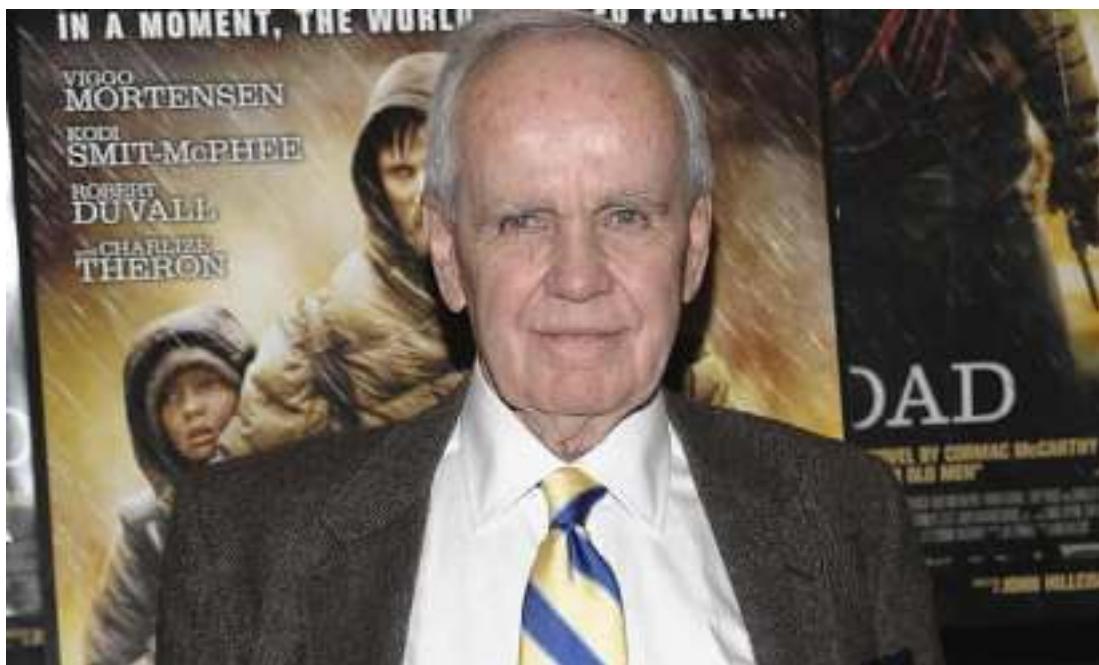
Selena Gomez: a joke too far. Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

Once again, Selena Gomez has responded to a television show referring to the kidney transplant she underwent in 2017, in yet another indication that we are living through an unmapped era of late-stage celebrity. "I am not sure how writing jokes about organ transplants for television shows has become a thing but sadly it has apparently," the singer and actress [wrote on Twitter](#), adding that she hoped such jokes would not make it past the writers' room next time.

The transplant had previously been referred to on the *Saved by the Bell* reboot, but in this case Gomez was referring to a scene from the theatrical legal drama *The Good Fight*, in which a character cited the star's surgery as something that could not be joked about. *The Good Fight* is one of the boldest dramas on television, which often pulls ideas for its storylines from current affairs and runs with them; it ended its last season [with an episode centred on Jeffrey Epstein](#) and the closing moments were so jaw-droppingly odd that even this *Good Fight* devotee wondered how it had got away with it.

But the Gomez line was in an episode about cancel culture and was followed by another character wondering if they could get cancelled for even joking about being cancelled. It's not hard to sympathise with Gomez's sensitivities, but it's questionable as to whether the line was even a joke and the ripple of outrage over it feels like an extension of the plot. Perhaps the real cancellation is part of the show? No one said late-stage celebrity was going to be straightforward.

Cormac McCarthy: end of The Road for Twitter hoax



Cormac McCarthy: not a member of the Twitterati. Photograph: Evan Agostini/AP

Cormac McCarthy found himself with a coveted blue tick on Twitter last week, meaning that the reclusive 88-year-old author had been verified and was officially who he said he was. Suspicious minds might have noted the spelling of his name as McCrthy; others may have simply decided that it was a nod to turn-of-the-century Primal Scream (sorry, [Prml Scrm](#)), a vowel-less statement on an apocalyptic techno-future. After all, he does have form.

[Except it wasn't McCarthy](#). Incredibly, the account holder who tweeted “There I wrote a Tweet Are you happy now Terry” turned out not to be McCarthy at all. “It’s obviously not him,” said his agent. Twitter quickly acknowledged that it had acted in error. “The account referenced was verified by mistake and that has since been reversed,” it said. This is not the first time a fake McCarthy has duped Twitter into believing it was the real one; in 2013, Twitter founder [Jack Dorsey](#) was duped into welcoming him to the fold. It is an amusing diversion, but surely attempting to fool social media into believing you are Cormac McCarthy has to be among the world’s more niche hobbies.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 8 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Chardin's still life featured in "Guess the painting" (18 July, New Review, page 46) is called *Basket with Wild Strawberries*, not "cherries", as we had it.

Other recently amended articles include:

[Eddie Izzard: 'Becoming an MP is still my goal'](#)

[Professional dog walkers in London sound alarm over curbs on numbers of pets](#)

[The Pages by Hugo Hamilton review – a book with a story to tell](#)

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
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Letters: it's not what you say but the way that you say it

The BBC's Alex Scott is right to take pride in her accent, but sometimes it's good to compromise



Alex Scott: proud of her roots. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Alex Scott: proud of her roots. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Sun 8 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

I appreciate Alex Scott's pride in her local accent but not her commitment to its use on every occasion ("[BBC's Alex Scott is 'proud' of her accent, despite call from peer for 'elocution lessons'](#)", News). I was born and brought up in the north-east of England. We were encouraged to speak both standard English and the regional dialect, for the sake of clarity and courtesy.

This bore fruit when I moved from a London teaching hospital to my home town for midwifery training. Under the expert guidance of supervising midwives, I was proud to learn to calibrate according to individual mothers between "Please push towards your tail, Mrs Higgins" and "'Ave a big shuv, luv" to produce the best results and satisfaction of all concerned.

Ann Corsellis
Cambridge

Rather than sneering at the admirable Alex Scott, Digby Jones would have been better employed attacking the home secretary, Priti Patel. She habitually drops the "g" from present participles, which has made her

contributions to the Downin' Street briefin's even more infuriatin' than they would otherwise have been.

Julian Ellis

Marlow

Morality of the climate crisis

David Wallace-Wells's argument for adaptation to the climate crisis omits the moral aspect ("[Adapt or die. That is the stark challenge to living in the new world we have made](#)", Comment). However good our adaptation measures are, and even if (fat chance) the rich countries offer sufficient help to the developing world, large parts of the world are going to become uninhabitable: the Sahel, Bangladesh, parts of the Middle East, just for starters. The inhabitants of these countries will have nowhere to go and massive international transfers of population will inevitably result.

We, a country recently rated as one of those most likely to be able to adapt, will be a magnet. The effect of this will be a steep rise in the government's willingness to adopt brutal policies to prevent the arrival of refugees. This is already happening: Priti Patel's anti-immigrant policies are morally indefensible. As the crisis deepens, we are certain to see a deepening of the moral gulf, too. Politicians will continue to exploit public anxiety.

Jeremy Cushing

Taddyforde, Exeter

For the love of Latin

The introduction of Latin in state schools will do little to counter its reputation as an elitist subject ("[State schools to teach Latin](#)", News). Latin is still mostly taught via the 19th-century grammar-translation method. This treats Latin as a code rather than a language and is well known to be exclusionary due to the inherent difficulty of learning abstract and technical rules of grammar. As these rules bear no relation to how the brain processes language, it does not lead to language acquisition.

Modern methods of teaching languages, informed by the science of second language acquisition, are needed if students are to actually read Latin (the

primary goal for many). Such methods, often referred to as “active Latin” or “living Latin”, are growing in popularity among some teachers. They lead to better language skills, are more enjoyable and, crucially, are [far more equitable](#).

When treated as a tool of active communication, Latin is beautiful and can give easy access to 2,500 years of literature on a mind-boggling array of subjects. But unless the curriculum abandons its outdated ways, Latin will remain dry, irrelevant to the vast majority, as dead as Caesar and the preserve of a privileged few.

Matthew Jay

London WC1

The trouble with men

Tom Lamont’s piece was an important and long overdue exploration of how we can better bring up our boys (“[How to raise a boy](#)”, the New Review). I am regularly horrified at the appalling way that men treat women. I am also surprised and disappointed at how often the debate around the subject focuses on how women should protect or save themselves and how rarely we ask why our society is producing so many scared, angry, aggressive, violent, insecure and sometimes murderous men. It still seems as if there is an assumption that it is women who have to learn to deal with toxic masculinity. Surely prevention is always better than cure?

Alan Montgomery

London SE5

School inequality is not new

Though no supporter of the government’s policies for education, I cannot accept the contention that responsibility for the blighting of this generation’s prospects “lies with no one other than this government” (“[This is quickly becoming no country for young people](#)”, Editorial). The disparity in attainment between those from richer and poorer backgrounds, exacerbated by the pathetic response to the educational consequences of the pandemic, has been with us since the onset of state education in the 19th century. No governments, with the possible exceptions of the Attlee and Blair/Brown

administrations, have done anything substantial to address it. The current government is the latest to wilfully ignore the fundamental fault line in our society that nothing short of fundamental social change can shift. This has always been “no country for young people” from economically impoverished backgrounds.

Professor Colin Richards

Spark Bridge, Cumbria

Struggle for the soul of Tibet

Your report (“[Reincarnated... but as what? India joins fray over the next Dalai Lama](#)”, World) could not have appeared at a better time: there is a growing perception in China that, because of Beijing’s ever-expanding political and economic clout, international support for Tibet is flagging. There are two reasons why China wants to appoint a Dalai Lama of its own choosing: China is an authoritarian state and cannot countenance an institution not under its direct control; China lacks credible soft power. What better way for it to fill such a vacuum than to harness Buddhism to its foreign policy narrative, which explains why Beijing is pouring in money to revive the Gandhara trail of Buddhist sites in Pakistan and building a Buddhist centre in Myanmar’s capital, Naypyidaw.

For the Chinese, appointing a “Sinicised” Dalai Lama is no more than securing a strategic advantage in Tibet. But for the Tibetans, such an appointment amounts to undermining their culture and identity that goes back 2,000 years. This is why it is imperative that Tibetans alone should have the right to select their next Dalai Lama.

Randhir Singh Bains

Gants Hill, Essex

We need a Labour alternative

Labour’s strategy director, Deborah Mattinson, believes the party should “appeal to older, non-university educated people, many of whom voted for Brexit” (“[Starmer aide warns: we’ve lost touch with target voters](#)”, News). Well, there goes the next election. When Ken Clarke derides the proposed royal yacht as “silly populist nonsense”, Labour keeps shtum; when the

Tories cut foreign aid, Labour's response is muted; when Nigel Farage calls the RNLI a taxi service for migrants, Labour is slow to condemn; and when Priti Patel dismisses taking the knee by England's footballers as "gesture politics", Labour doesn't attack her unequivocally.

Why this reticence? Because it is desperate not to offend the (allegedly) socially conservative, "patriotic" voters in its former heartlands. This fatally compromises its message – no wonder people don't know what Labour stands for. Above all (and for the same reasons), Labour misses one opportunity after another to condemn Brexit, a misconceived policy that all main political parties opposed in 2016.

Instead of chasing the same group of elderly nostalgists, Labour should be presenting, with confidence and optimism, a clear alternative to the failed agenda of this wretched government. The answer is right there in last week's editorial: "[This is quickly becoming no country for young people](#)". Younger people have been shafted by one government after another, but they (and anyone with a progressive bone in their body) will come out and vote in droves if Labour comes up with a positive, green, pro-European offer and promotes it unapologetically.

Michael Rundell

Canterbury

Who let the dogs out?

Professional dog walkers in London are concerned that the number of dogs they walk might be limited to four ("[Dog fight on Hampstead Heath as walkers sound alarm over curbs](#)", News). I can't be the only one who thinks that there are just far too many dogs around. Everywhere.

Judy Roberts

Menai Bridge, Gwynedd



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Can Covid death rates be reduced to a clash of values? It's not so simple

[Kenan Malik](#)



The pandemic has exploded the myths of lazy stereotypes of east v west



Members of the Korean Health Workers Union shout slogans during a rally in Seoul calling for an increase in the number of nurses assigned to Covid-19 wards. Photograph: Ahn Young-joon/AP

Members of the Korean Health Workers Union shout slogans during a rally in Seoul calling for an increase in the number of nurses assigned to Covid-19 wards. Photograph: Ahn Young-joon/AP

Sun 8 Aug 2021 02.30 EDT

‘The fight against the novel coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of ‘Asian values’.’ “Asian culture’s emphasis on obedience to authority could play a role in explaining how successful public health measures have been in the region.” “The massive disparity in eastern and western responses to the pandemic lies in their cultural values. Western ‘individualistic’ culture puts the needs and desires of the individual the priority whereas eastern ‘collectivist’ culture pushes societal needs to the forefront.”

Last year, “Asian values” became the one-stop explanation for the success of countries such as China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and Vietnam in controlling the virus. The west, many insisted, had paid for its individualist ethos by having populations refuse to obey the authorities, fail to wear masks or observe lockdowns.

Except that it has not quite turned out like that. The Olympics in Tokyo have been superb, full of spectacle and drama. But there have been no spectators in the stadiums to watch that drama. Tokyo is in its fourth lockdown and Covid cases are still rising sharply. Most Japanese did not want the Games and in no country has there been more scorn for the way the authorities have handled the pandemic. Less than a third of the population has been vaccinated and only a minority trust Covid vaccines. The only other nation so sceptical of vaccines is another east Asian country, South Korea. Those two countries also have the lowest levels of trust in health authorities’ ability to deliver an effective vaccination programme. There are reasons for such scepticism, such as Japan’s history of botched vaccination programmes. Yet all this puts a dent in the claim that Asian countries are particularly trusting of authority and exhibit a herd-like obedience.

Meanwhile, in Britain, [96% trust Covid vaccines](#). The supposedly highly individualist population has throughout the pandemic desired more restrictions than the government imposed. The [latest polls](#) suggest almost half of Britons think restrictions have been lifted too soon (as compared with one in eight who think they should have been eased sooner); the vast majority want masks to be mandatory in shops and on public transport and social distancing rules maintained; half want nightclubs closed; and almost one in five want to maintain the toughest forms of restrictions – banning people from leaving their homes except for essential shopping, exercise and work.

Such attitudes are not peculiar to Britain. At the beginning of the pandemic, most European nations were highly supportive of lockdowns and other [restrictions on personal freedoms](#), much to the surprise of the authorities. Trust in vaccines has [increased in most European nations](#), including in France where, for historical reasons, there has been greater hesitancy. Australia has seen low numbers of Covid cases and deaths, but also a [glacial rate of vaccination](#). Individual states have imposed a [series of severe lockdowns](#) but, despite a number of anti-lockdown protests, most people view the authorities as having [handled the pandemic very well](#). Australians seem as, if not more, willing to conform to government demands as people in most “Confucian” countries.

Perhaps the most depressing consequence of the east/west myth is the belief that one can have only one or the other

Far from there being a simple east/west divide, the global picture is messy in terms of attitudes, policy and outcomes. East Asian countries have disappointingly low vaccination rates, but the numbers of Covid deaths also remain low. Britain has a very high proportion of vaccinated people, but the numbers of deaths are very high and few would suggest, with the exception of the vaccine rollout, that policy has been coherent or well-judged.

This messiness reflects the fact that both responses to Covid-19 and the outcomes are the products of many factors. One reason many east Asian states were initially better prepared for Covid was their [recent experience of similar diseases](#), especially Sars. In Britain, the [plan that had been prepared](#)

[for dealing with pandemics was shelved](#), partly because of austerity. The hollowing out of the state, and outsourcing of basic functions, has [restricted Britain's ability to react](#) to major issues. In the EU, both the inertia of the bureaucratic machine and the tensions between national interests and bureaucratic needs paralysed policymaking, most noticeably in the vaccine rollout. In America, political polarisation has [shaped attitudes to Covid](#) and to social restrictions.

Much of this complexity gets ignored in the drive to look for simple categories through which to view people and events and for simple divisions with which to explain the world. Many cultural developments in east Asian countries, from Seoul's club scene to Japanese subcultures, belie the "conformist" tag. Or consider that in comparing [China](#) and Taiwan the fact that one is authoritarian and the other democratic matters more than the fact that both have Confucian traditions. Ignoring that distinction allows many to portray authoritarianism as Confucianism. Nor is Confucianism the only philosophy in east Asian countries – it is simply the one with which western observers are most familiar.

Similarly, the idea that one can simply distil "western values" into individualism is as misleading as imagining that "eastern values" are synonymous with conformity. Liberal individualism is certainly a key thread in western traditions. But western cultures have been shaped by figures as divergent as Aristotle and Aquinas, Edmund Burke and Karl Marx, as by the philosophers of the liberal tradition, such as John Locke or John Stuart Mill.

Perhaps the most depressing consequence of the east/west myth is the belief that one can have only one or the other: that one can either be socially minded or believe in individual freedoms. The fallout from this kind of zero-sum thinking has been the distortion of ideas both of freedom and of social-mindedness. On the one hand, ideas of freedom and rights have been increasingly associated with the right and trivialised. When the refusal to wear a mask becomes seen as a heroic celebration of individualism, there is something deeply confused about the notion. Meanwhile, many sections of the left seem to have forgotten the importance of freedom to those who least possess it and have come to view community-mindedness as the imposition of greater restrictions.

There are clearly cultural differences between nations but to frame such differences in terms of “east v west” is to ignore the reality. If the pandemic has revealed anything about values, it is that east and west are still struggling to work through the relationship between individualism and community-mindedness.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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What is it about Viktor Orbán that attracts so many rightwing sycophants?

[Nick Cohen](#)



Hungary's leader and Fox News are natural bedfellows in peddling paranoia politics



Tucker Carlson: ‘The dependable voice of the dominant force on the right that will destroy democracy.’ Photograph: Richard Drew/AP

Tucker Carlson: ‘The dependable voice of the dominant force on the right that will destroy democracy.’ Photograph: Richard Drew/AP

Sat 7 Aug 2021 14.00 EDT

Tucker Carlson is not much to look at. A little man with a face screwed into the scowl of a junior manager passed over for promotion, you might walk by him in the street with barely a glance. Only when he describes how “the elite has turned against its own people” should you take notice. Carlson is the dependable voice of the dominant force on the right that will destroy democracy in the name of “the people”.

Last week, Carlson’s Fox News beamed an admiring show from [Viktor Orbán’s Hungary](#), even though there is every indication that Orbán will make it Europe’s first rightwing dictatorship since the fall of Franco’s Spain in 1975. Fox News built its audience and Orbán built his power by creating paranoid fears of an enemy so dangerous, any tactics can be justified to defeat it. Usually, it is the globalised liberal elite that turns against its own people by allowing mass immigration. Orbán has added a fascistic twist to the great replacement conspiracy theory by blaming the Jewish financier George Soros for plotting to flood Christian Hungary with Muslims. If it is

not migrants, it is the gay men he implies are [paedophiles](#), and if it is not gay men, it is the [European Union](#). The name of the enemy is incidental. The point about modern far-right politics is that there must always be an enemy.

For a long time, people who should have known better took authoritarian regimes at their own valuation and described Hungary, Turkey and, until it became too embarrassing, Vladimir Putin's Russia as "illiberal democracies". I can see why the idea appealed in theory. By ultra-progressive standards, all democracies, including ours, follow illiberal policies on crime and immigration. There is no necessary conflict between illiberalism and democracy. On the contrary, traditional conservative policies are often what a majority of the electorate wants.

But illiberal paranoid politics can never be compatible with democracy. Paranoia turns opponents into traitors engaged in an evil plot against "the people". The only way to deal with traitors is to crush them and if the crushing entails the destruction of democracy and the perpetuation of the ruling elite's power, that is a price the elite is happy for others to pay.

Like the unforgivably overrated [Roger Scruton](#), Trump's mentor [Steve Bannon](#), that part-time defender of free speech [Jordan Peterson](#), and until recently the leaders of Europe's nominally anti-dictatorial [Christian Democrat parties](#), Carlson was comfortable with his own hypocrisy. The right he represents says it believes in freedom of speech when liberals threaten it. Yet in Hungary, [freedom of the press is in its death agonies](#). Regime supporters control state and most private TV stations and newspapers, while the rest must fear a government-appointed media council that can issue heavy fines for "immoral" reporting. Conservatives who cheer on Orbán are against cancel culture it appears but only when their opponents are doing the cancelling.

The lesson of recent history is that the right can abandon the constitutional order and be rewarded rather than punished

The right says it believes in free societies, yet in Hungary higher education is under state control so "liberals" cannot pollute the minds of the young. It says it is on the side of the people. Yet in Hungary corruption runs from

Orbán's elevation of a childhood friend into a [billionaire](#) to the everyday bribes ordinary Hungarians must pay to receive [healthcare](#). Elections are [gerrymandered](#) and judges and state bureaucrats are chosen for their loyalty rather than their competence.

The next election in 2022 will be worth watching. If somehow the opposition manage to beat a rigged system, many are asking if Orbán would concede power. Like Putin and other thieves in office, he must fear he will go to prison if he does.

To Michael Ignatieff, the willingness not just of Fox News but of a stream of conservative intellectuals and politicians to abase themselves before Orbán, as leftists abase themselves before the Cuban and Venezuelan regimes, raises what he calls the most important question in politics today: will conservatives abandon the principles of constitutional government? Ignatieff is well placed to ask it. He was the rector of Central European University in Budapest. When I last [interviewed](#) him, in 2017, the Hungarian opposition felt he could fight Orbán's attempts to drive the university out of the country. Ignatieff was a former opposition leader in Canada rather than an anonymous academic. He mobilised a global protest movement and the hope was it would force Orbán to respect academic independence. Today, he and the Hungarians who supported him are far gloomier. Dictatorial states brook no resistance and Orbán forced the university to move to Vienna in 2019.

The US Republicans have already made their choice. At the next election, they will not just suppress votes but have state election officials in place who will declare their opponents' victories fraudulent.

The British right is harder to define. [Boris Johnson](#) is not an Orbán or a Trump. Outside the pages of the worst Tory newspapers there is no Johnson personality cult. He doesn't terrify Conservative MPs into line as Trump intimidates Republicans. Privately, and increasingly in public, they show they neither respect nor fear him.

Yet I find it too easy for comfort to paint a picture of the Orbánisation of the UK. The attempt to [exclude 2.5 million voters](#) without ID cards from the franchise, the rise of property developers and Russian oligarchs exploiting their links to the Conservative elite, the attacks on the BBC that have

culminated in state appointees attempting to [politically vet journalists](#), the suspension of parliament and threats to the judiciary are symptoms of a system heading towards decadence.

After Hitler's defeat in 1945 and the fall of the rightwing dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece in the 1970s, western conservative parties committed themselves to observing liberal democratic rules. But the 70s are a long time back and the 40s further still. The lesson of recent history is that the right can abandon the constitutional order and be rewarded rather than punished. It is not too paranoid a response to paranoid authoritarianism to imagine that one day Tucker Carlson will be broadcasting live from London and heaping sycophantic praise on Boris Johnson as he heaps it on [Viktor Orbán](#).

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

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

Tom Daley takes 10m diving bronze and uses platform for LGBTQ+ awareness

- Daley: ‘I hope seeing out athletes will help people feel less alone’
- Briton eyes Paris 2024 after finishing third behind Cao and Yang



Tom Daley finished third in the 10m platform final behind China's Cao Yuan and Yang Jian. Photograph: Bernadett Szabó/Reuters

Tom Daley finished third in the 10m platform final behind China's Cao Yuan and Yang Jian. Photograph: Bernadett Szabó/Reuters

[Barney Ronay at Tokyo Aquatics Centre](#)

[@barneyronay](#)

Sat 7 Aug 2021 08.01 EDT

Tom Daley took the bronze medal in the 10m platform dive on an afternoon of vertiginously high-grade competition. This was a thrilling final, perhaps the finest 10m dive competition staged, with gold and silver medals decided by the final dive of Tokyo 2020.

With six breathless rounds all but completed Cao Yuan of China, a gold medallist in 2012 and 2016, needed a stellar final effort to reclaim top spot from his countryman, Yang Jian, who had just produced a jaw-dropping forward four and a half somersaults pike, the most difficult dive in the competition.

[Tom Daley and Matty Lee pip China to win Olympic diving gold at last](#)

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Cao nailed it to take gold by a wafer-thin 1.95pts. Daley, who had led until the fourth round, finished 32pts back from that Chinese one-two. A bronze here to go with [his gold in the synchro](#) and successes at previous Games makes Daley the first British diver to win four Olympic medals.

In the glow of victory he refused to rule out returning for Paris 2024, when he will be 30, tempted by the lure of two extra events and by the basic joy of competing.

“There was a moment just before my first dive I looked around and I was like: ‘You know what I’m at the [Olympic Games](#) and this is bloody cool.’”

Asked about the social media abuse of LGBTQ+ athletes at these Games, Daley [again used his platform](#) to speak about the domestic happiness that has driven his success and the significance he knows it carries as a high profile athlete.

“There’s still a lot further to go, there are 10 countries competing at these Olympic Games where being LGBT is punishable by death. I feel extremely lucky to be representing [Team GB](#), to be able to stand on the diving board as myself with a husband and a son and not worry about any ramifications.

“But I know that I’m very fortunate to have that and there are lots of people who grow up around the world with less fortunate situations.

“I just hope that seeing out sportspeople in all these different sports is going to help people feel less alone, feel like they are valued and can achieve something.

“History shows everything that society is has been dictated from the straight, white, male experience. And there are so many different perspectives and points of view, whether that’s race, whether that’s religion, whether that’s gender, whether that’s sexual orientation, whatever it is. There are so many different points of view and if we can come together and use all those different points of view, then the world would be a better place.”



Tom Daley celebrates winning a bronze medal in the 10m platform dive.
Photograph: Adam Davy/PA

This has been a happy Games for Daley – his best he said – and as in the men’s synchro he was part of a wonderful final. The field included Rikuto Tamai of Japan, who is 14, Oleksii Sereda of Ukraine, a year older, and Cassiel Rousseau of Australia, a converted gymnast with shaggy haired dive-dude persona. But it was clear from the start that Daley and the two Chinese men were in a different class.

It was Daley’s second dive that pushed him into top spot early on, an inward three and a half somersaults that he executed nervelessly, entering the water with a reassuringly dead thunk. Yang is a less graceful diver. He meets the water without friction and has a fearless athleticism. But Yang and Cao trailed Daley by five points.

Round three was always likely to be key. The so-called “firework” is Daley’s Everest, a dive he has struggled with so profoundly at one point he sought the help of a psychologist. He was solid this time around.

Daley’s armstand back three somersault in round four was a startling spectacle. Such is the life of a diver. You perform a rock-solid handstand on the edge of a 10m board. You top it with a perfect triple somersault. You

manage to emerge not just conscious but with barely a splash. At which point someone announces you've only scored six and half for an act so fearlessly brilliant it seems absurd any human would actually attempt it. Cao and Yang surged past.

Daley's sixth dive, the back three and a half somersault pike, was a regal affair, enough to secure the bronze, which he celebrated by hugging his coach, waving into the cameras and taking a long deep breath at the end of a dual-medal competition that has spanned 12 days.

Then came that bravura finish, a moment of undiluted Olympic brilliance from the two Chinese men that left Cao looking almost bemused in his moment of victory. It is a stunning record, an unbroken run of gold in this absurdly high-stakes sport that stretches back to London 2012.

Cao was first enrolled in a diving class by his mother as she wanted him to learn self-discipline. It seems safe to say that lesson has been taken on board. Like Daley he is young enough, at 26, to be back for more in Paris, where an expanded competition will offer more medals. Cao lists his hero as Cristiano Ronaldo. He laid his own claim to diving greatness here.

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

Galal Yafai completes arduous journey to win GB's first Tokyo boxing gold

- Early dominance over Philippines' Carlo Paalam secures title
- 'I'm Olympic champion now, it sounds crazy,' says Briton

00:46

Galal Yafai 'overwhelmed' after winning boxing flyweight gold – video

[*Tumaini Carayol*](#) at Kokugikan Arena

Sat 7 Aug 2021 01.24 EDT

If ever there was a measure of how well Galal Yafai had managed the most important, pressure-filled moment of his career so far, it came in the immediate seconds after the third round of his final bout. He had played his hand so perfectly, dominant in the opening two rounds and then calm in the last, that as soon as it was over he already knew. Everyone knew. Yafai walked back to his corner with a rare, beaming smile across his face: “Oh, mate,” he said. “Wow.”

Moments later, what every single inhabitant of the sparsely populated Ryogoku Kokugikan already knew was confirmed. Yafai is the Olympic champion, victor in the flyweight division after a wonderfully crafted performance to see off Carlo Paalam of the Philippines. He is Great Britain’s first boxing gold medalist in Tokyo in a tournament that has produced the country’s highest total of Olympic medals in the sport – six – since Antwerp 1920.

[Team GB rise to fourth in Olympic medal table after flurry of success](#)
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Above all, this was personal vindication for the arduous journey that he took to this moment, the toils he has faced and overcome through the strength of his character. Yafai spent his early 20s working in a Land Rover factory, shifting boxes and detesting his work. Those around him continually offered words of encouragement about his prospective boxing career but he lacked the self-assurance that radiates from him now. He did not believe them.

Asked how he would have reacted if someone told him back in those days that he would be Olympic champion, Yafai shook his head. “I’d laugh at them,” he said. “But to be fair all the coaches tell me: ‘Galal you’re going to be Olympic champion,’ and I say: ‘No chance.’ I’d just say: ‘Nah, they’re just saying that to be nice to me; they’re my coaches.’ But they were right.”

It also marks another, and certainly the most recognisable, addition to the overflowing family mantlepiece. In a sense, his older brothers paved the way – 30-year-old Gamal Yafai has won European and Commonwealth titles and Kal Yafai, 32, was a longtime WBA super-flyweight champion. But Galal Yafai has also trod his own individual path and he has been rewarded. He says that there is no competitiveness among them, just love.

“Whenever I do anything good it impacts them,” he said. “So if I’m Olympic champion it’s great on them, which I’m happy for. And when Kal does well and Gamal does well, it looks great on me as well. We’re a close-knit family and close-knit brothers so hopefully they can celebrate this with me too.”

The ease with which he controlled and dismantled his opponent belies how difficult this task was. Paalam had been nearly flawless in the tournament, demonstrating his speed and intelligence throughout as he lost just one round en route to the gold medal match.

No matter, Yafai cornered his foe from the beginning and never let him go. He was relentless. After harassing him throughout the opening minute, the pressure finally yielded a decisive moment as Yafai softened Paalam with a slick right-handed jab, which set up a beautifully straight left hand square in Paalam’s face. Paalam’s knees crumbled beneath him.



Yafai in charge against Carlo Paalam. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

“I felt strong coming into the competition. I put him down. I was a bit surprised as well, I’ve given three counts now so I must have a bit of strength there,” said Yafai afterwards, pointing to his biceps.

After Paalam faced the standing eight count, Yafai immediately resumed his barrage of blows, comprehensively taking the first round. The judges duly rewarded him the round with 10-9s across the board.

There were signs of life from Paalam towards the end of the opener, however, and he grew into the intense second stanza as both men went after the other, trading blows with fearless aggression. But Yafai peppered Paalam with smooth left uppercuts throughout and whenever they came in close, he always seemed to have the final word. All but one judge awarded him the second round, putting him in an almost certain position for gold aside from disaster.

And he knew it. With victory in his hands, Yafai immediately adjusted his tactics. He spent the third round smartly managing the match, allowing Paalam to take the initiative and taking no risks himself. Paalam took the round but Yafai comfortably won the bout.

In the glow of his success, Yafai shrugged off the questions everyone wants to know about his future. There will be plenty of time for him to think about Commonwealth Games, world championships and particularly turning professional which, of course, is “a big thing that everyone wants to do”.

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For now, his only will is to enjoy an unhealthy meal, perhaps Five Guys, to see his family again in Birmingham and, above all, pass some time without thinking about boxing at all. What a family he will return home to.

“Thank God, he’s managed to bless us with boxing,” said Yafai. “We’ve just got to keep our heads down, keep working. I’m Olympic champion now, it sounds crazy saying I’m Olympic champion now. It hasn’t sunk in yet, I’m sure it will soon.”

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Chinese uproar as state TV host calls gold-medal winner a ‘manly woman’

Shot put champion Gong Lijiao quizzed about boyfriends and settling down into ‘a woman’s life’



Gong Lijiao is the first Chinese athlete to win a gold medal in an Olympic field event. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Gong Lijiao is the first Chinese athlete to win a gold medal in an Olympic field event. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

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Fri 6 Aug 2021 07.44 EDT

The Chinese state media channel CCTV has been roundly criticised after a TV anchor described an Olympic medallist as a “manly woman” and asked her if she had plans for “a woman’s life”.

Gong Lijiao, 32, won a gold medal in the women’s shot put on Sunday with a personal best of 20.58 metres. It was the first gold medal in a field event for any Chinese athlete ever, and the first gold for an Asian athlete in shot put.

But when viewers tuned in to the CCTV’s trackside coverage, they were introduced to Gong by a journalist who told the studio the athlete had given her the impression she was “a manly woman”. It then cut to a pre-recorded

chat where Gong replied she “may look like a manly woman on the outside, but inside I’m still more of a girl”, the BBC reported.

The journalist then asked whether Gong had plans for “a woman’s life”, appearing to catch her off guard.

“Since you needed to be a manly woman for shot put, do you feel you can be yourself from now on?” another female reporter asked.

“Um, maybe I’ll look at my plans,” replied Gong. “If I don’t train, then perhaps I will lose weight, get married and have children. Yes, it’s the path one must take in life.”

The first journalist also used the interview to ask Gong whether she had a boyfriend, what sort of boyfriend she was looking for, and if she arm wrestles them, the BBC reported.

Online, the reaction was swift, and a hashtag related to “Are women only limited to talk about marriage” was viewed more than 350m times and drew more than 161,000 comments. The furore fed into a wider social discussion in China about the representation of women, [feminism](#), and changing expectations around female beauty and traditional roles.

One comment said: “Some only care about Gong’s figure and uterus whilst she is on the track of achieving her dream.”

“It’s not that she can’t get married, but that few men in this session are worthy of her,” another popular post said.

“She is too good to marry any of them. [Women](#) are entitled to talk much more than just marriage, like our dream and success.”

Gong replied: “This expresses how I feel, thank you!”

In an interview with English-language state media, CGTN, filmed prior to the Olympics, Gong said it had been a difficult training journey, not helped by pandemic delays.

Gong said the goal for her fourth Olympics was clear: “Championship.”

Additional reporting by Jason Lu

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‘Without her, I wouldn’t be here’: Covid patients reunited with the medics who saved them



Dr Susan Jain helped save the life of Salvation Army minister Karl Gray.
Photograph: Harry Borden/The Guardian

Dr Susan Jain helped save the life of Salvation Army minister Karl Gray.
Photograph: Harry Borden/The Guardian

Four people who were so ill that they barely remember their time in the ICU meet the doctors and nurses who held their hands



Sirin Kale

Sat 7 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

In a light-filled studio in east London, a petite woman in scrubs receives a bouquet of flowers from a tall man, dressed smartly, only faintly out of breath.

The room is thick with emotion. They are strangers, but stare at each other with wonder in their eyes. And then Dr Susan Jain, an intensive care consultant at Homerton university hospital, breaks the silence with a laugh.

“Hello,” she says. “Wow. It’s amazing to see you up and about.”

Karl Gray, a 60-year-old Salvation Army minister from north London, flashes an embarrassed smile. “I’m sorry,” he says. “I don’t remember you.”

These are not long-lost relatives meeting for the first time. Gray is coming face to face with the woman who saved his life, just over a year after he was admitted to her ICU unit, gasping for breath.

“I don’t remember an awful lot about ICU,” Gray tells Jain. “But I am so grateful for what you did for me in those first few days, and I can never

thank you enough. You saved my life. And I'm here today to be able to say that to you, which is amazing.”

“Just seeing you looking great is enough,” she replies, her eyes brimming with tears. “It goes beyond anything. Because it's no secret that many people admitted to ICU did not survive.”

You became very sick very quickly. You were at death's door. We thought you were very close to not surviving

Jain is not exaggerating. In England, almost a third of Covid patients admitted to hospital during the early months of the pandemic died of the disease. So conscious were ICU staff of the taint of death that lingered around their units that, during the second wave of the pandemic, some put up posters, reading: “Most people leave here alive.”

Instead of seeing ICUs as places of horror and sorrow, the public should see them as places of great tenderness and love. They are intensive *care* units, after all. A place where people with fine minds and empathic hearts use all of the powers at their disposal to keep perfect strangers alive.

Yet the relationship between ICU staff and the patients they treat is often curiously one-sided. Many patients hospitalised with Covid-19 were sedated and put on ventilators, to give their organs time to respond to experimental drugs and, hopefully, to heal. Machines flushed out their kidneys, oxygenated their blood, and manually pumped their lungs. Snaking tubes fed them and took away their waste. The patients hovered in a liminal state between life and death.

The lucky ones woke up from the sedation, recovered, and went home. Many of them never knew the names or faces of the people who looked after them so carefully for weeks, or got the chance to thank them for saving their lives. Until now, that is. Over the past few weeks, I have travelled the UK, reuniting for the first time four former ICU patients with the staff who saved them.

Karl Gray fell ill around 15 March 2020. By 4 April, he couldn't breathe. He remembers the ambulance driving towards the hospital. It was early morning. The streets were empty. The last thing he remembers is the ambulance reversing into the bay. The rest is blank.

Jain also remembers the Covid-deserted streets of March and April. "It was eerie," she recalls. "Like the apocalypse had hit." Her commute to work took 15 minutes, instead of the normal 40. Once there, Jain would be responsible for an ICU full of sick and dying people. "One of my trainees described our ward round as putting out little fires everywhere," she remembers. "Our unit usually ran on 12 beds... suddenly we had 30 patients, all ventilated, and all super sick."

The hardest thing for Jain was having to sedate patients before putting them on a ventilator. The fear in their eyes, as they held her gaze. The knowledge that she may be the last person they would ever see. "Often you would put people to sleep and you knew that was it. It was highly emotional."

Gray's work as a Salvation Army minister also brought him into contact with the extremes of the human experience. He was at Grenfell as the tower burned. He has spent decades comforting the sick and the dying. And then, it was his turn.



Dr Susan Jain was one of those who cared for Karl Gray, 60, during the eight weeks he spent in hospital. Photograph: Harry Borden/The Guardian

He arrives at the photographic studio stiffly clutching the bouquet. His wife, Ruth, is by his side. Gray is a stoic, taciturn presence – Ruth does much of the talking – but when Jain arrives, he appears overwhelmed. Ever the doctor, Jain's eyes immediately flick to Gray's neck, to see how the scar from his tracheotomy vent has healed. "It's looking good," she smiles warmly.

Jain describes the moment they first met. "I can remember you on your bed in the corner," she says. "You got super sick on the first day. You fell into a heap." Gray may be abashed that he doesn't remember Jain, but this is not unusual: he was very sick, and on a cocktail of drugs, and she was wearing PPE that obscured her face.

"You became very sick very quickly," she goes on, softly. "You slipped into multiple organ failure within 24 hours. You were on a ventilator, you had medicines to help your blood pressure stay up, and a dialysis machine to help your kidneys function. And we were turning you as well." Proning patients, by rolling them on their front, helps them breathe. "You were at death's door." She pauses. "I have to say that, among the consultants, we thought you were very close to not surviving."

While Jain's team was working desperately to keep Gray alive, he had surreal, narcotic-influenced dreams. "I was on a hospital ward," he says, "but the ward was on a submarine somewhere in eastern Europe, in the winter. I could see the faces of all the people, but they had masks on." Jain nods. "That was you emerging from the sedation," she says. "Water and boat themes are very common. Because you're on a mattress that blows up and down to relieve different pressure areas, so people often think they've been on a boat."

Gray remembers brief, discomfiting snippets of his ICU stay: seeing curtains go up, and staff quickly remove patients who had died. "That must have happened four or five times," he says. "It was emotional, because I knew that could be me who was taken out."

Jain, too, was not without fear. In the first wave of the pandemic, when vaccines were a faraway hope, and doctors did not yet really know how the virus spread, she would have nightmares that she'd contracted Covid-19 and passed it on to her family. "I'd jump out of bed and check my oxygen saturations, thinking: of course I'm going to get it. Why wouldn't I?"

It's emotional to meet her. Without her knowledge and expertise, I wouldn't be here today. I'm indebted to her for ever

Their conversation turns to survival and faith. There's a misconception about medical science, says Jain. [Doctors](#) don't have all the answers; they don't know why some people survive and others die. "I can only remember a couple of other people who were sailing very close to the wind who also survived," she says. "And we don't know why. Nobody knows why."

Gray is a man of faith. "From day one," he says, "there were hundreds, if not thousands, of people praying for me. And I believe to this day that those prayers were answered. I am totally adamant that is the reason why."

His road to recovery has been a long one. He spent five and a half weeks in ICU, and a further two and a half in hospital. "I lost the use of the muscles in the lower part of my legs and ankles," he says. "I had to relearn how to walk." At home, Gray had to use a walking stick. Going to the bathroom was an effort. "I'm still behind where I'd like to be, physically," he tells me.

More discomfiting was the mental disorientation. Gray has been shown photographs of his ICU stay, and struggles to square the images he sees with the knowledge that it is him in the photos. "I recognise myself," he says, "but I don't remember any of it." When the medicine started to wear off, Gray mistakenly thought he'd been in a car accident.

Both doctor and patient are different people, post-Covid. "I'm calmer now," Gray says. "I think I'm more tolerant than I was. I'm more emotional. Things that felt important before don't feel as important now." If a car cuts in front of him in the street, or someone pushes into a queue, he doesn't care. "I've realised there's lots in the world to be grateful for," he says. "You are just thankful for the ability to be alive, and back with friends and family."

Jain is considering working less, to spend more time with her children, who are 10 and 12. “In the old, corny way, life is too short,” she says. “It takes a global pandemic to make you realise what’s important to you. I haven’t been able to see my family as much as I’ve wanted to, but now I want to make up that time with them. My parents won’t be here for ever. And I do want to look after my own mental health.”

How is your mental health, I ask. “Fragile,” Jain responds. “Delicate. Yeah.” She feels as though she has been to war.

Jain was raised to be resilient; a graftster. “In truth,” she says, “there was always an expectation that I would be a doctor. My dad was a GP, and there’s an expectation in many Asian families that you will do something professional.” After school, she would often spend afternoons at the surgery, watching him work.

At medical school, Jain was drawn to intensive care because of the intellectual challenge the specialism posed. “My fascination became the ultra-sick patients. I like a conundrum. A diagnostic puzzle. And of course, I love helping people.”

After a life of hard work and compulsive overachievement, the pandemic finally knocked the wind out of her sails. “My whole life, my dad brought me up to be like, ‘Pull the curtains and get over it.’ But this, I don’t mind saying, has knocked me a little bit. It’s vast, in how it feels.”

But today has been a good day, for both Gray and Jain. “It’s emotional to meet her,” says Gray. “Without her knowledge and expertise, I wouldn’t be here today. I’m indebted to her for ever.”

On the back of the ICU staffroom door in the Royal Liverpool university hospital is a photograph of Dave Collins, a 66-year-old retired lab technician. He is there to remind staff of one of their great success stories: a man who, against all the odds and the expectations of the doctors treating him, survived.

Collins arrives for our meeting walking slowly, heavily, visibly out of breath. He is waiting to be assessed for supplemental oxygen. The stairs are

an effort. “He hides it, but he’s not well,” murmurs his daughter Christine.

He is here to meet Andrew Smith, a 34-year-old ICU nurse. Collins presents Smith with a Liverpool FC face mask. “You’re looking really good,” Smith says. “A lot better than the last time I saw you.” Collins was worried he wouldn’t recognise Smith. “I had a lot of nurses,” he explains, apologetically. But he does remember him. “You tried to get the football commentary on for me,” he says, with recognition. Smith nods. “We won 2-1,” he says.



Andrew Smith nursed 66-year-old retired lab technician Dave Collins in January 2021. Photograph: Craig Easton/The Guardian

Collins was admitted on 29 January 2021, during the second wave. At the time, the hospital was overflowing with Covid-19 patients. For the first few weeks, Smith was on a continuous positive airway pressure, or Cpap, therapy machine to help him breathe, but he continued to deteriorate. The experience of being in ICU was terrifying. “It was like something out of a science fiction film,” he says. “Lines and lines of beds of people in comas and intubated.”

The people around him were dying. “Everyone in his room was doing very badly,” Smith says. “Dave was seeing all of that... he watched the guy

opposite him die.” Smith would stop and speak with patients when they were visibly frightened. “They didn’t need to see you running around in that moment,” he tells me. “You had to go and sit with them, because they were obviously petrified.”

He remembers one patient who, certain he would die, transferred all his money to his daughters. “I think about that a lot,” Smith says. “He must have known what was going on.” Collins describes those early weeks in ICU as full of fear. Even in sleep, there was no respite. “I had really vivid dreams,” he says, “and in almost every one of them, I died.”



The staff kept diaries for all the ICU patients, and Andrew Smith wrote entries for Dave Collins. Photograph: Craig Easton/The Guardian

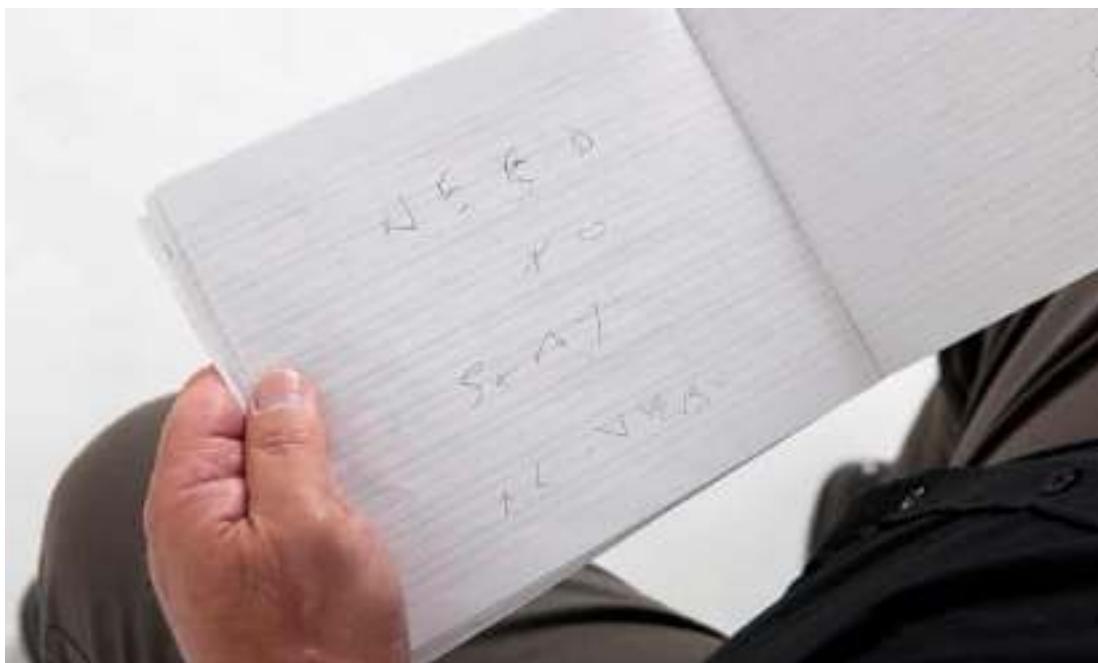
While in the ICU, Collins had time to reflect on his life. “I remember him telling me about his grandkids,” says Smith, “and how the best thing he ever did was retire early and spend time with them, on holiday.” Collins’ words struck a chord with Smith. “There’s a time limit on being a nurse,” he says. “I see people who are still working who, in my opinion, should be enjoying what they’ve got.”

Smith became a nurse, he jokes, “because they didn’t let me be a paramedic. I didn’t get through the interview.” It was a fortuitous rejection: Smith loves

nursing, and intensive care in particular. “You get to do absolutely everything for your patients,” he tells me. “You are there to speak up for them when they can’t. You are there to care for them when they are at their sickest.” The worst thing, of course, was when patients died. “No one likes losing a patient,” says Smith. “I hate it.”

Doctors told Collins he needed to be ventilated on 19 February. “At the time they put me under, they said I was the sickest person in the hospital,” he says. Staff set up a Zoom call for him to say goodbye to his family. “That was the hardest thing of all,” he says, in a strangled voice. “Saying goodbye to everyone.” A nurse holding up the iPad had to excuse herself after the call, to sob. His next memory is of seeing a chink of light, as if glimpsed through a letterbox. “I remember the nurse saying, ‘David, you’re doing well, but we have to put you back under. Your body needs to rest.’ And the next thing I remember is like someone flicked a light switch on.”

While Collins was sedated, Smith kept a diary for him, to help him fill in the blanks, as the staff did for all the sedated patients in the unit. “I’m so grateful for the diary,” says Collins, who has brought it with him. The men pore over it together. “Hi Dave,” reads an entry on 1 March, as Collins was beginning to recover. “It’s Andrew again. You keep making really good progress... keep up the good work, mate.”



‘Need to stay alive,’ reads one of the entries Dave Collins eventually managed to scrawl in his diary. Photograph: Craig Easton/The Guardian

Later, the notebook bears Collins’ attempts at communication; the tube in his throat made it impossible to speak. “My name is Dave Collins,” reads one barely legible scrawl. “Need to stay alive,” reads another.

Smith is a stoic, matter-of-fact person, but the past year has changed him. “I’m far more emotional than I have ever been in my life,” he says. “Ask my fiancee. She can vouch for that. I’ve cried at home.” He tried not to think about all the people he lost. “After the first wave,” he says, “you could beat yourself up, thinking about everyone you lost... it’s not healthy.”

Collins, too, is a changed man. “I can only walk very small distances,” he says. Showering is an effort. Doctors say it might be two years before his lungs fully recover. But he is thankful simply to be alive. “You have to appreciate every day,” he says. “Believe me, when you’ve been staring at no more days, you realise that every day is a good day.”

Collins shows Smith the book again. “Need to stay alive,” he reads. “You did the job.” Collins nods. “Thank you.”

For years, Santo Hill has volunteered in the charity shop at Blackpool Victoria hospital. As the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic swept the UK in February 2020, the retired midwife turned B&B owner had no idea that, within weeks, she would be whisked to this same hospital to be treated by her colleagues.

Meeting Hill, 70, I initially think there’s been some kind of mistake. She radiates youthful vigour. She tells me she worked for a decade after her retirement, then bought herself the B&B to run as a hobby. “I’ve only got nine bedrooms,” Hill says. “It’s manageable.”

Hill was admitted on 9 April 2020. “I could hardly breathe,” she says. “I was really struggling.” On 12 April, staff sedated her and placed her on a ventilator. When she came around, on about 25 April – she is not sure of the exact date – Santo was desperate to get out of the ICU. “In my head, I was screaming for my family to come and get me,” she says.



Santo Hill, 70, is a retired midwife who volunteers at the hospital where she was nursed by Naomi Threlfall in April 2020. Photograph: Craig Easton/The Guardian

Born in Malaysia, Hill was the third of 14 children. “From the age of 11, I was cooking for my family, because my mother was having babies,” she says. For her entire life, Hill has been fiercely self-reliant and determined – which made her a horrible patient. “I am a control freak,” she says. “I need to be in charge of my own life. I don’t want anyone else looking after me.”

Hill hated being sick. “It was noisy,” she says. “There was too much light. I couldn’t use my legs.” She was fitted with a tracheotomy tube, so “I couldn’t communicate with anybody. I had had enough.” At one point, she even texted her brother in Germany. “I said: ‘Come and get me. Get me out of here.’”

ICU nurse Naomi Threlfall is not one to hold a grudge against a tricky patient; she visibly radiates compassion and kindness. She says more than once of nursing, “It’s not a profession, it’s a vocation. You have to be a certain kind of person. I love my job.” Threlfall doesn’t see Hill as a demanding patient. “She was no more difficult than anyone else,” Threlfall says. “In all honesty, she had every right to be. She was gasping for breath and really sick. We thought we had lost her numerous times.”

There's been so much sadness over the last 18 months that to see you today is just beautiful

Hill is not the sort of person to give herself over to public displays of emotion. As a former medical professional, she had excellent insight into her condition, and meeting Threlfall is, for her, mostly about getting answers. “What I want to ask you,” she says at one point, “is why I was on renal dialysis?” Threlfall explains how sick she was. She tells Hill that she didn’t think she was going to make it. The team would prone her, rolling her on her stomach to increase her oxygen flow, but it didn’t help. “My brothers and sisters were told I had a 20% chance of survival,” Hill says.

Threlfall, by contrast, is emotional: “There’s been so much sadness over the last 18 months that to see you today is just beautiful.” It makes Threlfall remember all the people who didn’t make it. “It’s just really sad. And you don’t have time to think about what’s happened. You’ve got to carry on.”

The past year, Threlfall tells me, has taken a toll. She has been a critical care nurse for six years, and the pandemic feels like all of the previous years rolled into one. “I don’t think I could do another end-of-life call with a relative via FaceTime,” says Threlfall. “It shouldn’t have been us sitting with their loved ones as they were taking their last breaths.” It was hardest when the dying patient was awake. “You just sit with them,” says Threlfall. “Hold their hands. Reassure them and try to meet their needs.” Burnout is common. “I think we all have PTSD,” Threlfall says. “We’ve all felt like we were on a treadmill and it’s difficult to keep going, at times.”

Although Hill has made a full physical recovery, she has been more affected by her brush with death than she lets on. “After the second lockdown, when the B&B was closed, that’s when it suddenly hit me,” she says. At a follow-up meeting with the doctor, Hill had a panic attack. The doctor told her to take it easy. She won’t, of course.

As we leave, Hill invites Threlfall to come and visit her at the hospital charity shop, where she has resumed her volunteer duties. They swap numbers. An unlikely friendship may have just started.

When consultant anaesthetist Dr Niki Snook walks around the ICU unit at St James's University hospital in Leeds, she sees the faces of the people who didn't make it, despite her team's best efforts. "Every time I look at certain beds, I remember the people in those spaces and the family conversations we had, and it's heartbreakin," she says. "We're not machines. There was many a time when quite a lot of tears were shed."

But 43-year-old businessman Tariq Butt is one of her success stories. Snook didn't expect him to survive. "He got so sick so fast," she explains. Her team transferred him to Wythenshawe hospital, where he was put on an Ecmo machine, a hi-tech piece of equipment that took the pressure off his heart and lungs. Doctors in Manchester didn't think Butt would make it either, but they operated on his lungs in a last-ditch attempt to keep him alive.

"They called my wife and told her to come and say goodbye to me," says Butt. The day after the surgery, her phone rang. Butt's wife was terrified to answer it, because she thought it was doctors calling to tell her that he had died. But it was good news.

He can't remember any of this. His last memory is of being sedated on 12 April last year. "I felt that my life was over," he says. "I was finding it hard to breathe." As a Muslim, Butt knew what he needed to do: "I rang my oldest brother in Pakistan and asked him to forgive me, if I had ever upset him. And I rang another person in Leeds, and apologised for doing something bad to him – I hurt his feelings. It was important for me to do this, because if a person doesn't forgive us before we die, then Allah won't forgive us."

After these phone calls, doctors placed Butt on a ventilator. In total, he was sedated for three months, first on the ventilator and later on the Ecmo machine. When he woke up, he couldn't move anything apart from his eyes. He spent another three months in hospital, learning to walk again.



Consultant anaesthetist Dr Niki Snook helped treat 43-year-old businessman Tariq Butt. Photograph: Craig Easton/The Guardian

A year later, he meets Snook outside in blinding sunlight. “Hi Niki, how are you?” Snook is visibly emotional. “Oh my goodness,” she says, eyes filling with tears. “I’ve never seen you standing up.” Butt beams. His boyish smile makes him look far younger than his 43 years. “That’s right – when I was in hospital I obviously couldn’t stand up,” he says. They stare at each other in silence for a moment. “You look incredible,” says Snook.

She has prepared a timeline for Butt of his key dates under her care. He pores over it. “12 April,” he says. “I felt that was the last day of my life.” Butt doesn’t recognise Snook, but he offers up heartfelt thanks regardless. Meeting her, Butt says, “is like I’m meeting an angel that saved my life”. Snook interjects: “One of lots of different angels,” she says, at pains to emphasise that she is one of a team of people.

The hardest thing, he tells Snook, was the three months he spent in hospital in recovery. “I had four kids waiting for me,” he says, “and I needed to get home to them.” He cries and wipes his face with a tissue. “You don’t realise how every movement you do is a miracle. Breathing, talking, eating, walking. You don’t realise how big a thing that is until you can’t do it any more.”

Unbeknown to him, Snook and her team called Wythenshawe hospital regularly to check on him. “We kept up to date with how Tariq was doing,” Snook says. “We’d ring them up and say, ‘Gosh, he can’t still be on Ecmo, can he?’ So he’s always had a special place in our hearts.”

Neither expected to find their meeting so moving. When Snook looks at Butt, she explains, she sees the ghostly presence of all the other people who didn’t survive Covid-19. “My heart goes out to the people who didn’t make it through, and their families,” she says. “There are so many people who have lost somebody through no fault of their own.”

Talk turns to rising case numbers in Snook’s hospital, and the sense that this nightmare is happening again with hospitalisations from the Delta variant. “We’ve got more Covid patients in hospitals again, and we’re having to extend our wards to make sure everyone is kept safe,” says Snook. When I catch up with her in late July, Covid admissions for her trust have more than doubled. Most of these patients are unvaccinated. “This is not over,” Snook says. “All of us are really waiting with bated breath, thinking, ‘Oh no, please don’t let it happen again.’ None of us want to go back to April of last year.”

For Butt at least, the ordeal is over. “I made it through,” he says, momentarily jubilant, before he grows sombre once again. “Sometimes I’ll be sitting at home and I think: ‘I’m alive, but so many other people didn’t make it. How are their kids doing? What are they thinking?’”

Listen to Karl Gray and Dr Susan Jain meet on the Guardian’s [Today In Focus podcast](#) from 9 August 2021.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Alarm as US Covid cases above 100,000 a day for first time since February

- Seven-day hospital admissions average up 40% from last week
- Mississippi health official says Delta surging ‘like a tsunami’



Healthcare workers at a vaccination event in Florida. About half of all new infections and hospitalizations in the past week were in seven southern states. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

Healthcare workers at a vaccination event in Florida. About half of all new infections and hospitalizations in the past week were in seven southern states. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

[Amanda Holpuch](#) in New York and agencies

[@holpuch](#)

Fri 6 Aug 2021 15.08 EDT

Daily Covid-19 cases in the US moved above 100,000 a day for the first time since February, higher than the levels of [last summer](#) when vaccines were not available, and came as health officials sounded alarm over lagging rates of vaccination driving the surge of the infectious Delta variant.

The seven-day average of hospital admissions has also increased more than 40% from the week before, with health workers describing frustration and exhaustion as hospitals in Covid hotspots were again overwhelmed with patients, almost 20 months into the pandemic in the US.

[Does the US have to wear masks again for the Delta variant of Covid?](#)

[Read more](#)

“As we look at our hospitalizations and as we look at our deaths, they are overwhelmingly unvaccinated people,” CDC director Rochelle Walensky said at a briefing on Thursday.

About half of all new infections and hospitalizations in the past week were in seven southern states – Florida, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, [Alabama](#) and Mississippi – even though the states represent less than a quarter of the country’s population, said White House coronavirus coordinator, Jeff Zients.

In [Mississippi](#) on Thursday, there were 3,164 new confirmed cases, the second highest single-day caseload in the state during the pandemic.

“We’re seeing a phenomenal increase in daily reported cases of Covid, and this is entirely attributable to the Delta variant, which is sweeping over Mississippi like a tsunami,” said state health officer Thomas Dobbs.

The entire state had just [eight ICU beds](#) available on Thursday, officials said, and more than 1,147 people were hospitalized with Covid-19.

Nichole Atherton, an intensive care nurse in Mississippi, told Reuters she was planning to resign from her hospital and find nursing work elsewhere

because she couldn't stand watching Covid's toll on her community.

"The first wave was heartbreaking, because there was nothing people could do except stay away from the people they love," Atherton said about infections last year before vaccines were developed. "This time, there are options."

Three people have messaged her to say they will get vaccinated, Atherton said.

At a White House coronavirus briefing on Thursday, officials said as cases surge, efforts were focused on communities with [low vaccination rates](#), which are driving the pandemic.

"Across the board, we are seeing increases in cases and hospitalizations in all age groups," said Walensky.

Walensky said the CDC had reported more than 103,400 new cases of Covid on Wednesday, and that the seven-day average for cases was about 89,463 per day.

One bright spot is vaccination rates are now increasing again across the US. White House data director [Cyrus Shahpar said](#) that on Wednesday there were more vaccinations in a single day than since 3 July, with 864,000 new doses reported administered. Of those, 585,000 were first shots.

Of the three vaccines approved for emergency use in the US, Johnson & Johnson only requires one shot, Pfizer and Moderna's vaccines need two shots several weeks apart, and all three give strong protection.

Some of the same states responsible for the increase in cases are also picking up the vaccination pace. The White House said [Tennessee](#) has seen a 90% increase in first shots over the past two weeks. Oklahoma saw an 82% increase and Georgia saw a 66% percent increase.

"The unvaccinated continue to be the big highway of transmission," William Schaffner of Vanderbilt University Medical Center told CNN. "So the unvaccinated continue to be the big highway of transmission. The

vaccinated, they're little side streets. Let's not get preoccupied with that. We need to get more people vaccinated.”

A growing number of companies are requiring employees get the Covid-19 vaccine. United on Friday became the first major US airline to require all employees get vaccinated.

And defense secretary Lloyd Austin is expected to soon order vaccines mandatory for the military. More than a million service members are fully vaccinated of the roughly two million active-duty, guard and reserve troops, according to the Associated Press.

Meanwhile, hospitals are fighting to get financial help from state and federal officials. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (Fema) provides funding to help cover some Covid-related costs at hospitals.

But state officials in Texas are denying funding requests from hospitals as cases surge across the state, after providing \$5.39bn earlier in the pandemic, which was reimbursed by Fema, [according to local news channel WFAA](#).

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[St Vincent and the Grenadines](#)

St Vincent PM recovering in hospital after rock attack by anti-vaccine protester

- Ralph Gonsalves taken to hospital after attack on Thursday
- Nurses and police protesting over fears of mandatory vaccines

00:38

St Vincent leader attacked by anti-vaccine protester – video

Staff and agencies

Fri 6 Aug 2021 15.47 EDT

The prime minister of [St Vincent and the Grenadines](#), is recovering in hospital after a protester threw a rock at his head during an anti-vaccine demonstration in the eastern Caribbean island.

Ralph Gonsalves, 74, was attacked on Thursday as he walked through a group of about 200 protesters to get into parliament.

[CNN fires three employees for coming to work unvaccinated](#)

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Video footage following the attack showed a dazed Gonsalves, his white shirt turning red as blood streaked down. Security guards rushed him from the scene and he was later flown to nearby Barbados for medical care.

“By the grace of God almighty, I’m doing well and on the mend,” Gonsalves wrote on social media on Friday. He said there was no sign of neurological damage.

Thursday’s protest was organized by unions representing nurses, police and other workers who fear Covid vaccinations could be mandated for some employees by the government, according to reports and videos on social media.

Gonsalves had previously said that proposed changes to the nation’s public health law would not include any penalties for those who refuse the shots.

There was no justification for the attack, he said on Friday.

“We can have our disagreements, but to cross the line into violence is unacceptable in a democratic society,” he said.

The attack was criticized by others including Ronald Sanders, ambassador to the Organization of American States.

“This development in Caribbean politics is reprehensible,” he said.

Local media quoted Senator Julian Francis saying that an unidentified woman had been arrested.

St Vincent and the Grenadines, a chain of 32 smaller islands in the southern Caribbean, is home to more than 110,000 people.

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[New South Wales](#)

NSW has worst day of Covid pandemic with 319 new cases, five deaths and lockdown of Armidale

Deaths linked to latest coronavirus outbreak reaches 27 as four new cases recorded in Newcastle

- [Victoria Covid cases spread into public housing tower as Queensland forced to wait on lockdown decision](#)
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The NSW health minister, Brad Hazzard, announced a lockdown of the Armidale LGA while reporting 319 new Covid cases and five deaths.
Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

The NSW health minister, Brad Hazzard, announced a lockdown of the Armidale LGA while reporting 319 new Covid cases and five deaths.
Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

[Mostafa Rachwani](#)

[@Rachwani91](#)

Fri 6 Aug 2021 23.47 EDT

New South Wales has recorded its worst ever daily increase in Covid infections, [at 319 new locally acquired cases](#), as the state continues to grapple with a deepening crisis.

[The state also recorded five deaths](#), three of which are linked to an outbreak at Liverpool Hospital in Sydney's west, which was sparked by a health worker becoming infected and transferring coronavirus to patients.

Five deaths have been linked to the hospital outbreak, and the latest deaths were a woman in her 80s, a man in his 80s and a man in his 90s. Another man in his 60s and a man in his 80s from the inner west have also died.

NSW Health's Dr Jeremy McAnulty said none of the people that died were vaccinated, with deaths linked to the latest outbreak now standing at 27.

[Australia Covid live news update: NSW reports 319 new cases, five deaths and Armidale lockdown; Victoria records 29 cases and Qld 13](#)
[Read more](#)

"None of these five deaths, people who died, were vaccinated, and we extend our sincere sympathies to their loved ones," he said.

The virus continues to spread into the regions, with [Armidale the latest LGA to be placed into lockdown](#), after recording two new cases on Friday.

"If I were living in the area I would not be going out of the house today," the NSW health minister, Brad Hazzard, said.

"I would be staying at home. I would not be visiting friends, and I would be making sure that I protect myself and my family."

Hazzard said the infections may have come after a "particular young person" went into the area and transmitted the virus to a resident.

The lockdown will begin from 5pm on Saturday, and will last until midnight on Sunday 15 August, with the rules being identical to the ones applied in greater Sydney, the Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong, Shellharbour, the Hunter and Upper Hunter.

A total of 125 of the new cases recorded in the state are linked to previous cases, while 108 are household contacts of previous cases. A total of 194 cases are still under investigation, after the state recorded 108,449 tests on Friday.

Four new cases were detected in young people in Newcastle, two of which were living on-campus at the University of Newcastle.

McAnulty also said the virus has been detected in the sewage in Dubbo, where there are currently no cases. He urged residents there to come forward for testing.

Hazzard announced that almost 50% of the state had received their first dose of the vaccine, with the number of vaccines administered rising by 5% every week.

“The great news today is our doses for the first dose on population of 16 and above have reached almost 50%, so that is a very positive step forward,” he said.

“For those who are fully vaccinated, we are at almost 22%, and we are going up at about 5% per week.”

He also announced a “big day out for food providers of Sydney” on Sunday, where essential workers that deal with food will be invited to receive a vaccine at the hub in Sydney Olympic Park.

McAnulty stressed that authorities were still seeing rising numbers in the Canterbury-Bankstown LGA, which was now the “No 1” area for new cases.

“It’s our most prominent LGA,” he said. “So people in the Canterbury-Bankstown LGA, please take extreme caution.”

Hazzard said that compliance in the area had continued to be a problem, highlighting small businesses as an area that needed improvement, but stopped short of outlining any further restrictions for the region.

“Canterbury-Bankstown is a major area for workplaces, smaller workplaces and bigger ones,” he said.

“What we are seeing a larger workplaces, particularly with distribution centres, the larger ones ... and they are doing a fantastic job. Some of the smaller businesses not so good.”

Hazzard also responded to comments from the country’s chief medical officer, Paul Kelly, who on Friday said the state needed a “circuit breaker” to refocus its efforts.

“He hasn’t told us what that circuit breaker would be,” Hazzard said. “I think what it does is just expresses the concerns that we all have, that the

circuit breaker in NSW and in Sydney is for people to comply with the rules.”

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OpinionLocal government

Apsana Begum's court ordeal is an indictment of Tower Hamlets council

Shami Chakrabarti



We must examine the independence of local bureaucrats, and whether they can be trusted to deal with imprisonable offences



Apsana Begum outside Snaresbrook crown court, east London, on 30 July after being cleared of charges of housing fraud. Photograph: PA Video/PA

Apsana Begum outside Snaresbrook crown court, east London, on 30 July after being cleared of charges of housing fraud. Photograph: PA Video/PA

Sat 7 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

It could have been a John Grisham novel set in the Chicago of yesteryear. [Apsana Begum](#), Britain's first hijab-wearing MP, was acquitted last week of three counts of housing fraud in a failed prosecution by her own Tower Hamlets council.

Nobody involved in pursuing this trial seems to have found it remotely odd that the complaint was made by the brother-in-law of Begum's ex-husband – the ex-husband himself being a councillor in a position of political oversight. The jury found Begum not guilty of all charges; in the eyes of her detractors, Begum's true crime may have been that she was a leftwing Muslim female MP.

The council alleged that Begum had lied in order to jump the queue for social housing, costing the taxpayer £64,000. It's not known how much public money Tower Hamlets has spent on the prosecution, but it would not be surprising were the figure in the region of many tens of thousands of

pounds. Questions must now be asked about why the council brought the case against Begum in the first place.

Begum's story is complicated. While studying for a BA in politics at Queen Mary University, she lived at home to care for her father through an extended period of dementia. His death in 2012 hit her hard, and it was during this time that Begum got to know the man who would become her husband. Ehtasham Haque, who had already been married twice, was apparently fascinated by Begum's political acumen and ambition. Begum's family did not approve of their relationship; during the course of the trial, she said they went as far as locking her in a room so that she had to call the police to aid her escape. She reported her fears of honour-based violence to the police .

[Labour MP Apsana Begum cleared of housing fraud](#)
[Read more](#)

Begum moved in with Haque. She told the court her husband was "controlling and coercive", and had taken over her finances. Haque published a statement via Twitter after Begum's trial stating that he completely denies ever having behaved inappropriately to her during their marriage, and that their separation had been amicable. This version of events was not pressed by the council during the trial. Whatever the reality, Begum left him, returning to her mother's home. Haque campaigned unsuccessfully against her selection as the parliamentary [Labour](#) candidate for Poplar and Limehouse.

Shortly after Begum was selected for the Labour seat in 2019, allegations of fraud made against her began to emerge that had been briefed to the media. The local authority alleged that her mother's home had four, not three, bedrooms, and that Begum had failed properly to inform them about her turbulent comings and goings between her marital and family homes in order to jump the queue when making an application for social housing.

At Snaresbrook crown court last week, Begum told the court she had notified the council of her movements for council tax purposes, and that her "coercive" husband had taken control of her affairs during this difficult period in her life. Nonetheless, the prosecutor seemed to suggest that

Begum, as an “organised and capable young lady”, could not have been under the control of her husband.

The prosecutor also implied that Begum, who worked temporarily as a council administrative assistant after graduating, had detailed knowledge of the social housing system. Begum’s counsel, the barrister Helen Law, pointed out that making tea and filing do not make you a municipal mastermind. In a striking moment of cross-examination, Law confronted a council investigations officer with the minutes of an audit strategy meeting in which he had reported to Begum’s ex-husband.

During the last two years, Begum has endured Islamophobic abuse and death threats over social media, leading the judge, Mrs Justice Whipple, to issue stern warnings for Begum’s protection. Her online treatment should anger everyone, particularly self-identified feminists – yet it has received surprisingly little condemnation or even attention.

That a case with such curious origins was ever pursued points to an urgent need to examine the independence of Tower Hamlets council and the reasons it sought to investigate Begum in the first place. A spokesperson for Tower Hamlets says that “justice has run its course” and “the matter is now closed”. Yet this judgment cannot be left to a council that has shown itself to be so riven with conflicts of interest.

More generally, we must ask whether local bureaucrats are ever independent enough of politicians to be trusted with parking fines, let alone imprisonable offences. At the very least, serious investigations should be left to the police and CPS. As for Apsana Begum, she enlarged Labour’s majority in her East End constituency in 2019, and remains one of the bravest and most articulate advocates for vulnerable people in the [House of Commons](#).

Shami Chakrabarti is a former shadow attorney general for England and Wales

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Letter from a curious parent
Michael Rosen

Dear Gavin Williamson, if Latin in schools is about levelling up, I have other ideas

Michael Rosen



Why not emulate private schools with class sizes, playing fields, music facilities and modern languages?



A Latin inscription at Eton College, the private school where Boris Johnson was educated. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

A Latin inscription at Eton College, the private school where Boris Johnson was educated. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 7 Aug 2021 03.30 EDT

Just as many of us are thinking ahead to winter and a possible next wave of Covid, worrying about whether schools have proper ventilation and what emergency measures you might have up your sleeve if a major outbreak occurs, you choose to put Latin at the top of your agenda. Well, not quite top because you also managed to signal the [end of BTecs](#) (a disaster in the making). Perhaps you were using your Latin splash to hide that announcement.

You're also keeping very quiet about what is happening with the GCSE marking – the results only days away for my offspring. I can't work out which is going to be more exciting: hearing his results or listening to your convoluted explanations as to why a) this year's teacher assessment method was perfect and b) why – even though it's been perfect – we'll all have to go back next year to the one-off, high-stakes, unnecessary [obstacle of GCSEs](#).

Let me lay out my cards about Latin: where there are the staff who can and want to teach it, I'm 100% in favour of Latin being offered as an option. But that option exists right now. This makes me ask, where are the teachers to teach it? I know your predecessor Michael Gove did away with the need for teachers to be qualified, but surely we would want someone teaching Latin to be at least one jump ahead of the students learning it for the first time?

[Boris Johnson's love of classics is about just one thing: himself | Charlotte Higgins](#)

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Then again, though I'm always delighted to hear of young people enthused by reading what and how people in ancient times thought, is there a big demand for it? Of course, the pick 'n' mix of GCSEs is not a level playing field. Subjects and groups of subjects do not have equal weight. Since the Blair government took modern languages off the compulsory list, 14-year-olds end up having to choose between, say, French and history, or Spanish and music and the like. For whatever reason, there doesn't seem to be a great will among most young people to learn modern languages. Would it not be better to address that problem first?

So, why would you have signalled Latin? You say the idea is to overcome the shadow of elitism, as Latin is taught much more in private schools than in state schools. My feeling is that if you want to nab the stuff that makes private schools so special then you could start with, say, smaller class sizes, move on to the provision of playing fields and music facilities, and then top it up with the admirable "educating the whole child" philosophies of many private schools.

But I figure that your real reason for waving the Latin flag is that it sounds like "levelling up", the prime minister's favourite soundbite, and it's easy to recruit some Latin enthusiasts to your cause.

Assuming Latin will not have any preferential status in the GCSE offer, its place should be up for examination. It helps you learn other languages, say some. This seems to be an odd way to justify learning the one language you may ever learn, but even so I don't think it helps you learn the languages of Asia, Africa and Oceania, though it's great for Spanish, French, Portuguese,

Italian and Romanian, assuming that is what the students are going to do for A-level ... bearing in mind that university [language departments](#) are closing down.

[Carpe diem, Mr Gove – this is all the Latin state school students need](#)
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Of course, some people like learning Latin as an intellectual exercise in itself – all those declensions and conjugations that can be dissected out of the words you read. That is because the Latin we read is the highly rarefied, standardised language of a tiny educated elite. Everything we know about “whole language use” is that when spoken across a wide area and across all classes, people speak it in many varied ways. Those forms of Latin, in so far as we can ever reconstruct them, will not be what is taught.

Naturally, you made your announcement in English, a language whose origins lie with the Germanic tribes of northern Europe who, you will remember, mostly resisted Roman imperialism. Is there a good reason why you are not also championing the teaching of Old, Middle and late medieval English – with Norman French thrown in? That way, students would be able to unlock the archaeology in most of the words, grammar and sentence structure of what they say and write every day.

It is interesting, isn’t it, that if your leader scatters a Latin phrase like, “ignoratio elenchi” (logical fallacy), there are people who seem to think this signifies the presence of a gigantic brain. Yet, dubbing a rapacious political opponent “grim ond grædig” (grim and greedy, from Beowulf) or someone deceitful a “smyler with the knyf undre the cloke” (from Chaucer), won’t push you up the education snobs’ league.

I look forward to seeing the £4m you’ll allocate to the Germanic, Scandinavian and Norman French origins of English, too.

Yours, Michael Rosen

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Trump may be fading away, but Trumpism is now in the American bloodstream

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



He left in disgrace, yet all signs point to a third presidential run. And his disdain for facts is now an article of Republican faith



‘Some hoped that the attempted insurrection might finally break the spell in those Republicans who had remained loyal. But it has not worked out that way.’ Donald Trump. Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

‘Some hoped that the attempted insurrection might finally break the spell in those Republicans who had remained loyal. But it has not worked out that way.’ Donald Trump. Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 6 Aug 2021 09.00 EDT

We have so much to worry about, it’s a relief that at least one big source of angst is no longer there to keep us up at night. Given how much psychic energy so many – inside the US and out – once devoted to him, how he came to invade even our dreams, there is solace in the fact that these days we need pay no more attention to Donald Trump. Right? I’m afraid not.

True, the great orange spectre has disappeared from the social media timelines, exiled by the emperors of Facebook and Twitter, reduced to starting his own blog to get around the ban – an effort that, like so many Trump enterprises before it, was quietly abandoned in failure. It lasted a month.

So each morning no longer begins with a peek through splayed fingers at the phone to see what fresh horror Trump has committed. But just because he is

out of daily sight does not mean he should be out of mind. Tragically, to the world's most powerful democracy and all those who, for better or worse, are tugged like the tides by its lunar pull, Trump still matters. He cannot yet be consigned to the past, because he is affecting the present and looms over the future.

The clearest evidence is the expectation that he will win the Republican presidential nomination for a third time and be the party's next choice for the White House. You need only take a look at admittedly premature [polls of the putative Republican field](#) for the next election: he's at the top, every time, with [76% of Republicans](#) viewing him favourably. It was scarcely a shock when the Trump-backed candidate [beat better-qualified rivals](#) to win a Republican congressional primary in Ohio this week. Not for nothing does the former Bush speechwriter David Frum [say of Trump](#), "Unless he's dead or otherwise unable by then, he's the likeliest 2024 nominee."

The single greatest predictor of whether an American has been vaccinated or not is if they voted for Biden or Trump

At the risk of haunting your dreams all over again, that is a daunting prospect. For election day 2024 will be just a few days shy of Joe Biden's 82nd birthday. If the president runs, he would be asking to remain in the Oval Office until he is 86. Many Americans would hesitate before granting that request. (At a mere 78, Trump will be able to run as the youth candidate.) But if it's not Biden, if it's Kamala Harris – or, frankly, almost any other Democrat – Trump will be able to hum the familiar culture-war tunes that brought him victory in 2016 and took him perilously close in 2020.

But let's say that scenario is both too distant and too gloomy. Let's say that, for whatever reason, it pans out differently. Even then, there is little scope to relax. Because even if Trump never returns, Trumpism is already in the American bloodstream.

Some hoped that the 6 January attempted insurrection might finally break the spell, disenchanting those [Republicans](#) who had remained loyal to Trump in the belief that, even if he was gross, crude and bigoted, extravagantly

selfish and self-regarding, he was ultimately harmless. The optimists reckoned that the sight of the head of the US government rousing a mob to storm the US Capitol – a mob bent on using force to overturn the results of a democratic election – would finally persuade most Republicans that on this critical point their political opponents were right: Trump did, after all, pose a grave threat to the republic.

But it has not worked out that way. Republicans in the House voted against impeaching Trump for his crime, while Republicans in the Senate [voted to acquit him](#) of it. Dissenters have been ostracised. Even her pedigree as the daughter of a conservative hardliner has not protected Liz Cheney, [expelled](#) from the House leadership for standing against the great leader. Riding high instead are the [conspiracy theorist Marjorie Taylor Greene](#) and her comrade Matt Gaetz, the latter reportedly [under investigation for sex trafficking](#), because they pass the only litmus test that matters: loyalty to Trump.

[Jared Kushner's hidden genius? To make terrible decisions – yet keep failing upwards | Arwa Mahdawi](#)

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The baseless claim that the 2020 election was stolen, that Donald Trump remains the true president and that Biden is a usurper, was once merely the stuff of Trump’s fever dreams, a psychological mechanism to protect his ego from the truth of defeat. But “Stop the Steal” is now an article of Republican faith. Nine months on, [a majority](#) of Republicans believe Trump won and Biden lost, against all the evidence and a string of court judgments finding every claim of voter fraud to be groundless.

It seems nothing will shift the conviction of the faithful, not even the latest confirmation that it was Trump, not Biden, who was determined to rob the people of their democratic will: “Just say that the election was corrupt [and] leave the rest to me,” [Trump told his acting attorney general](#) last December, according to a newly released note taken by the latter’s deputy. Meanwhile, an Arizona state senator [has called](#) for election officials to be held in solitary confinement.

The Republican tribe cleave loyally to the other defining feature of 2020 Trumpism: the refusal to believe in the reality of Covid and to do what’s

needed to thwart the virus. And so the single greatest predictor of whether an American has been vaccinated or not is whether they voted for Biden or Trump last November. [As of last month](#), 86% of Democrats had received at least one shot; among Republicans it was only 45%.

That's no surprise when Republican politicians compare the vaccination drive [to the Nazi persecution of the Jews](#) or [to the KGB knock on the door](#) and when Republicans at state level have [forced out public health officials](#) for pushing the vaccine too energetically.

Of course, these twin tenets of Trumpism are conjoined. What they share is disdain for expertise and contempt for facts, whether the experts be scientists or election officials and whether the facts relate to the nature of a virus or the sum total of votes cast last November. Trumpism demands instead that the facts bend the knee before the mighty helmsman. It is truth that must defer to the ruler, not the other way around.

Occasionally, you see a Republican who understands what's happened to their party. There's a [snippet of video](#) in which it pays to watch the face of the governor of Arkansas as an anti-vaxx heckler shouts down a briefing from a state medical official. In that moment, the governor seems to know that his party no longer believes in science or democracy, that the virus of Trumpism has infected its every organ. Whether or not Trump himself returns is almost secondary. The disease has already devoured the political party that constitutes half of America's body politic – and it's not done yet.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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Labour's preoccupation with 'values' is a basic political error

[Alan Finlayson](#)

Demands for change are the raw material of politics. Keir Starmer needs to start addressing them



'A party that isn't explicitly, consistently and loudly recognising and reorganising political demands isn't doing politics, no matter how proud it is of its historic "values".' Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

'A party that isn't explicitly, consistently and loudly recognising and reorganising political demands isn't doing politics, no matter how proud it is of its historic "values".' Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

Fri 6 Aug 2021 11.04 EDT

Labour leaders love to talk about values. [Gordon Brown](#) and [Jeremy Corbyn](#) both paid homage to what the latter called "shared majority British values". Last month, Keir Starmer held up the party's narrow win in Batley and Spen

as proof that “when we are true to our values ... Labour can win”. More recently his new chief strategist, the pollster Deborah Mattinson, was reported as arguing that Labour’s primary challenge is to develop “clearer, sharper, more uplifting messaging about the party’s values”.

So far the Labour leader has adhered with particular intensity to an orthodoxy according to which “values” are the wellspring of political engagement – and therefore Labour can do nothing until it convinces the electorate it shares their values. This is a terrible mistake. Politics is not grounded in values but in *demands*.

For most of us, party politics matters but is not the centre of our moral lives. Politics is how collective decisions are made about things the government might (or might not) do – things that we do or don’t want. Such wants come in all shapes, colours and sizes: higher pensions, no restrictions on planning, more national flags on public buildings, fewer wars, capital punishment, no workplace harassment, affordable housing, the cancellation of student debt, more windfarms. The list is endless.

Some may categorise these wants as cultural or economic, materialist or moral. It doesn’t matter. They aren’t exactly “fully costed policies”, but they aren’t abstract values either. They are things people may (and often do) demand of society, economy and government. And they are the raw material of politics. Political parties identify, mine and refine them. If they are good at politics, they reshape and organise those demands into an overarching, unifying, emblematic and encapsulating proposition – “spend more on the NHS”, “education, education, education”, “leave the EU” – around which a coalition large enough to win power may be built.

Because participants in such a coalition are united around demands, they do not need to share the same values. Maybe your values come from Methodism; maybe I got mine from my mother. For us to be political allies, I don’t need to be converted to your religion and you don’t need to meet my parents. I might want windfarms for environmental reasons; you might want them for job creation. I will support your call to end student debt if you support mine for higher pensions. Our reasons may be different but we still agree on the demand.

Political alliances are successful *despite* values not because of them; they thrive when people stop trying to agree on fundamental philosophies so as to get something specific done. The groups and individuals supporting leave in 2016 included anti-immigration obsessives and free-market fundamentalists, retired miners on the Lincolnshire coast and the chairs of parish councils in plush Norfolk villages. These do not share culture or values. They had a range of different demands that, in 2019, the Conservatives promised to fulfil by getting Brexit done. Labour's problem right now is not that values held by its electoral coalition are too diverse but that their different demands are not being appealed to and aligned. Forging that unity is what is known as political leadership.

Political advisers probably think that “values” are more important than demands because political scientists’ research seems to say so. Specialists in voting behaviour have found that if you want to guess how someone voted in the last election your chance of being right is higher if you combine information about individuals’ social, economic or occupational situation with their response to so-called “value statements” (about, say, capital punishment, schooling or legal authority). That’s an interesting and important finding. But it doesn’t translate into a simple means of winning votes.

If I tell you that in a particular country there are lots of palm trees, you’d be sensible to think it is probably often hot there. But you’d be mistaken if you concluded that planting a million palm trees will make the UK a tropical paradise. Similarly, if I tell you that lots of voters say they like waving the union jack, that’s useful information. But it doesn’t follow that planting flags everywhere will make the political climate more hospitable to the growth of Labour voters. Arborists and politicians both sow seeds in complex ecologies kept verdant by the meeting of fundamental demands.

“Values” do have a place within that ecology. But they grow there as political “character”. A party’s promise to meet our demands is useless if we think it is lying, or is sincere but naive. But demonstrating your political character is more complicated than simply announcing you are “trustworthy” or “competent”. Character is not – most of the time – something we evaluate in an abstract way. What counts is that someone is trustworthy or competent in relation to specific demands. For instance, I

don't ask my barber to look after my money, my bank to get me to the railway station on time or the cab company to cut my hair. I trust them to do the thing they are good at. If we are to trust a politician with power, we first need to know what they will do with it – which of our demands they might meet.

Consequently, perceived political character is inseparable from the demands to which it is linked. Voters who “trust” Boris Johnson know that they aren’t lending him money, having his child or publishing his racist novel. They want Westminster brought down a peg or two and the “political class” punished for arrogance and indifference. Playing the [role of chaotic wild card](#) unconstrained by the rules of normal politics, and intimating that Westminster is a sham he doesn’t take seriously, Johnson definitely looks like he can be trusted to mess up the place. That is his answer to the demand. And when Labour politicians play themselves as responsible, mainstream professionals, they imply that the only demand they will meet is for Westminster politics to go back to business as usual.

There are lots of other raw demands waiting to be forged into a political movement. There is the demand for a post-Brexit [trade policy](#) that understands the problems leaving the EU has created and does more than make the government look tough in newspaper headlines. Labour has begun to speak about this but needs to say more. Demands about work – availability, pay and conditions – are beginning to be [listened to](#), and ought to be seen as part of larger demands for security, dignity and the time and space to plan one’s future. There is the demand of the majority of people for whom the climate crisis is [a top priority](#). But Labour too often seems embarrassed by its own [Green New Deal](#), even as Joe Biden implements his. There is the huge demand for the provision of adult social care, but a Labour frontbencher says the party is [too frightened of the Tories](#) to talk about it. And there is the democratic demand that our politics be reformed so power and control are dispersed rather than further concentrated in the hands of Downing Street officials eager to hand out procurement contracts to their friends.

Starmerism generally avoids the language of these demands, preferring inoffensive reiterations of values. “Labour only wins when it glimpses the future,” he correctly informed the Financial Times this week, yet he chose to

emphasise only his “passion” for changing the country and “pride” at the accomplishments of past Labour governments. Confusing means and ends, Starmer says that his strategic vision is “[to win the next election](#)”. Politicians don’t get to declare themselves the winner before they have won over voters. To do that, you have to take hold of the raw demands waiting to be forged into a political movement.

An opposition doesn’t need a “fully costed manifesto”. But a party that isn’t explicitly, consistently and loudly recognising and reorganising political demands isn’t doing politics, no matter how proud it is of its historic “values”. Many liberal, centrist and leftwing activists like to think and talk in abstractions with capital letters: Hope, Trust, Decency. Many of them are happiest when confident they are living up to these values. Politics is their church. But most of us don’t attend that church. We demand a more secular redemption.

We see – correctly, I think – that politicians acting out their values won’t sort out our parents’ late-life care, protect our democracy or improve our children’s education. We need to know what politicians will do with the power they ask us to grant them. Their character is revealed when they choose to respond to some demands and not others – by their response to the call to action. When they fail to act, the judgment of character that follows is swift, merciless and very hard to rewrite.

- Alan Finlayson is professor of political and social theory at the University of East Anglia

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The Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation offers aid to dissident athletes while organising opposition to the regime's sportwashing efforts

- [IOC strips two Belarus Olympic coaches of accreditation over Tsimanouskaya scandal](#)



Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya arrives at a press conference in Warsaw, Poland on 5 August 2021 after being offered asylum by the Polish government. Photograph: NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya arrives at a press conference in Warsaw, Poland on 5 August 2021 after being offered asylum by the Polish government. Photograph: NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock



[Andrew Roth](#)

Sat 7 Aug 2021 00.00 EDT

When Belarusian officials [tried to muzzle sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya](#) and bundle her on a flight back to Minsk, a special organisation defending Belarusian athletes against repression stepped in to help.

The Belarusian Sport Solidarity Foundation (BSSF) supports players, coaches, and other professionals in sport facing pressure for opposing Alexander Lukashenko, who has held power in [Belarus](#) since 1994, or falling victim to his broad, brutal crackdown on dissent.

And while that may seem like a niche calling, in the year since [protests began against Lukashenko](#), more than 120 athletes, coaches and sport professionals have been fired, removed from competition, or otherwise punished because of perceived dissent, the organisation says.

[Saga of sprinter shows nothing in Belarus is outside politics](#)

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“Sport for Lukashenko is an instrument of propaganda,” said Aliaksandr Apeikin, the executive director of BSSF, who stayed in contact with Tsimanouskaya as her initial conflict with coaches snowballed into a hate campaign that demonised her on state television. “It’s an element of national politics, like in East Germany or the Soviet Union.”

BSSF was founded in 2020 soon after more than 250 athletes signed an open letter condemning fraud in the elections that delivered Lukashenko his sixth term in office and the excessive violence, including torture, levelled at Belarusians protesting against the official results.

As the number of signatories has ballooned to more than 2,000, more athletes have been purged for voicing their dissent.

“When athletes began participating in the protests, [Lukashenko] got very scared,” said Apeikin, noting their influence as public figures.

An influential figure among them was Aleksandra Herasimenia, a former Olympic swimmer who chairs the group. In an interview, she said that a key

message of the group was that “athletes are not slaves. They have the right to have their own point of view and position … Sport is part of politics. It has always been part of politics.”

[Map: Minsk, Belarus](#)

The three-time Olympic medalist has had to leave Belarus with her family and [has been targeted with criminal charges](#) because of her opposition to the government.

But she says that the positive responses have outweighed the negative. “For my whole athletic career, I had not gotten so many positive responses as when I spoke out about my position and, so to say, joined the people,” she said.

The organisation provides legal and financial aid to athletes, outreach to governing bodies such as the IOC, and has also sought to prevent Lukashenko’s efforts at sportwashing his reputation by attracting large events to the country. The organisation is also launching a [freedom marathon](#) on Saturday in support of the more than 35,000 Belarusians who have been jailed since the protests began in 2020.

Among its biggest successes have been lobbying for sanctions against the Belarusian National Olympic Committee and helping to convince the International Ice Hockey Federation to strip Belarus of the 2021 Ice Hockey world championships.

“Holding the championship would have allowed Lukashenko to legitimise himself,” said Apeikin. “We could not allow that to happen.”

Athletes are vulnerable because sport and politics are closely linked in Belarus, where many of the clubs and teams are run or funded by the state. Lukashenko personally headed the National Olympic Committee for decades before passing the role on to his son, Viktor. Both have been banned from Olympic events by the IOC in response to the crackdown on dissent in Belarus.

Sport “is a big toy for Lukashenko’s private propaganda”, said Yelena Leuchanka, a centre for the Athens-based Panathinaikos basketball team.



Belarus centre Yelena Leuchanka at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. She said she had no regrets about speaking out. Photograph: Carlos Osorio/AP

Meanwhile, athletes “can lose everything” for speaking out on social media or in interviews, the two-time Olympian added.

Recalling a US television pundit’s demand that LeBron James “shut up and dribble”, she said: “It’s the same thing but 100 times worse … think about how hard it is for athletes to be in a country like that with that kind of propaganda.”

Leuchanka was arrested for 15 days last September after she joined the peaceful protests against the Belarus government and signed a letter condemning Lukashenko.

She has described flea-ridden conditions in Minsk’s notorious Akrestina prison, where she and fellow inmates were crowded into cells with no mattresses and backed-up toilets.

But she said she had no regrets about speaking out about the government, saying that “somebody has to be first to take the step so that in the future we can change things for the better”.

And as athletes spoke up, it was important to have an independent organisation, like a player’s association, that could “protect the athletes at all cost”.

“As we’re playing such an important role in society, we deserve to have our voices heard,” she said. “We’re changing athletics. And we’re changing athletes.”

Participation in the group has cost many of those involved dearly. Asked how it had affected his life, Apeikin said: “Well, I have a criminal case opened against me. I can’t be in the country. That’s how it’s affected my life.” He and Herasimenia have been accused of trying to seize power from the government. As to threats to the safety of the group’s members, he says: “We shouldn’t get comfortable. We need to maintain some safety measures.”

But most of those who have gone public with their dissent have stood by their words. In a press conference on Wednesday, Tsimanouskaya told Belarusians “not to be afraid and, if they’re under pressure, speak out”.

“I did what felt right in my heart and I felt free,” said Leuchenka. “When I spoke my truth, after jail, it was just a confirmation that we are on the right path.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/07/the-support-group-at-the-heart-of-belarus-sporting-resistance>



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‘A sample of hell’: Rohingya forced to rebuild camps again after deadly floods

At least 21,000 refugees displaced after heavy rain devastates Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, the latest in a series of disasters to hit the area



Refugees clear mud that engulfed shelters after recent flash floods. In January a fire burnt 600 homes. Photograph: Yassin + Zia/Rohingya photographers for NRC

Refugees clear mud that engulfed shelters after recent flash floods. In January a fire burnt 600 homes. Photograph: Yassin + Zia/Rohingya photographers for NRC

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Kaamil Ahmed

Sat 7 Aug 2021 01.01 EDT

The process of rebuilding has begun once again for Rohingya refugees living in camps in [Bangladesh](#) after a week of heavy rains made thousands homeless.

The [chest-high waters](#) that flowed through parts of Cox's Bazar have exposed the vulnerability of the area's unplanned settlements, which have to be repeatedly repaired and rebuilt after flooding, cyclones and fires.

At least [21,000 refugees](#) were displaced by heavy monsoon rains that began on 27 July and lasted for days. Flash flooding inundated the fragile shelters, which are made of bamboo and tarpaulin, with landslides crushing those perched on unstable hills.

Zahed Khan, a [Rohingya](#) youth activist who lives in the Kutupalong refugee camp, said: "All of our family was at home and we didn't have any way to escape so we tried everything we could do to get rid of the water. We dug ditches to drain the water away."

He said most of his family's belongings and documents were damaged by the water. "We're trying to rebuild, with difficulty because we don't have the financial support to get materials. We spent days in the damaged shelter but after a few days some NGOs gave us materials like bamboo and tarpaulin."



The aftermath of the floods, which killed at least six Rohingya refugees and swept away infrastructure. Photograph: Yassin and Zia/Rohingya photographers on behalf of NRC

The main Kutupalong camp was established in the 1990s, but, since August 2017, it has rapidly expanded to become the [world's largest refugee camp](#). It is now home to 700,000 Rohingya who fled violence in neighbouring Myanmar.

Forests and hills were quickly cleared of vegetation by the refugees to make way for the expanding camp. But the mass deforestation has weakened the soil and rainwater runs straight off the hills instead of being drawn down into aquifers.

At least [six Rohingya died](#) in last week's floods, along with 15 Bangladeshis. The rains damaged bridges, roads and paths used by the refugees to move around within the sprawling camps and which are crucial to deliver aid in hard-to-reach areas.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said hundreds of clinics, aid delivery centres and toilets were damaged, though some have since been repaired. UNHCR said it provided kits to help tie down shelters ahead of the monsoon and cyclone seasons, and trained thousands of volunteers.

But with the camps locked down, as Bangladesh goes through its [worst outbreak of Covid-19 yet](#), and after [fires displaced tens of thousands of people](#) earlier this year, the past week's deadly rains have increased desperation among the Rohingya.

"The life we are having here at camp is like a sample of hell. We don't want to live here for one minute," said Mohammed Zonaid, a Rohingya photographer and aid worker whose shelter was damaged by a landslide.

"As long as we live here in the camp, we want to live safely and with dignity."

He said the pandemic had reduced the presence of aid organisations, which meant less preparation was made for this year's monsoon season.

"NGOs were not ready to deal with the rains and their lack of care meant people died and so many became shelterless," said Zonaid.

He said more pressure needed to be put on Myanmar to give the Rohingya the right to return, a move that seems highly unlikely after this year's [military coup](#).



Sandbags are used to try to stabilise a hillside. The floods caused landslides amid widespread deforestation in the surroundings of the camps.
Photograph: Yassin and Zia/Rohingya photographers on behalf of NRC

Many Rohingya refugees have lived in the camps in Kutupalong and Nayapara, also in Cox's Bazar, since the early 1990s.

A [fire in January](#) destroyed the homes and belongings of 3,500 people in Nayapara, including shelters where many residents had lived for almost 30 years.

[At least six Rohingya refugees killed as floods hit camps in Bangladesh](#)
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The families began a hunger strike in early July, refusing to take rations from the UN's World Food Programme until they were given better living conditions.

One of the strike organisers said, on condition of anonymity, that eight women involved in the strike had been beaten by police, and organisers had been threatened.

The World Bank announced on Thursday that it was committing \$590m (£420m) to help support the Rohingya and local Bangladeshi communities.

With the flooding devastating the region, the UN has stressed that support also needed to be provided to people living in nearby villages.

“Extreme weather affects us all,” said Jamie Munn, director of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Bangladesh.

“Host Bangladeshis in Teknaf and Ukhiya [districts], many of whom live in extreme poverty, are suffering the aftershock of floods as well. Currently, we are working directly with local government officials to ensure communities who graciously host refugees are not forgotten in the aftermath of disasters. A collective tragedy demands a collective response.”

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Wildfires

Wildfires burn out of control in Greece and Turkey as thousands flee

Protracted heatwave continues as flames threaten populated areas, electricity installations and historic sites



Kourkouli village during the night amid the wildfires, in Evia, Greece, on 5 August 2021. Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Kourkouli village during the night amid the wildfires, in Evia, Greece, on 5 August 2021. Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Associated Press

Fri 6 Aug 2021 12.13 EDT

Thousands of people have fled wildfires that are burning out of control in Greece and [Turkey](#), including a large blaze just north of Athens that left one person dead, as a protracted heatwave turned forests into tinderboxes and flames threatened populated areas, electricity installations and historical sites.

Turkey's wildfires, described as the worst in decades, have swept through swathes of the southern coast for the past 10 days, killing eight people.

In [Greece](#), firefighters were battling 56 active wildfires on Friday, Civil Protection chief Nikos Hardalias said. Multiple evacuation orders were issued for inhabited areas of the mainland and the nearby island of Evia, while the fire near Athens burned forests and houses in its path heading toward Lake Marathon, the capital's main water reservoir.

"We continue our effort hour by hour to tackle the multiple fires we face today," Hardalias said. "Conditions are exceptionally dangerous." The wind picked up on Friday afternoon in many parts of Greece, increasing the risk of fires.

Athens's main trauma hospital said a 38-year-old man had died after sustaining a head injury from a falling utility pole in Ippokrateios Politeia, one of the neighbourhoods north of Athens affected by the fire.

01:34

Greek prime minister says 'worst is yet to come' as wildfires rage around Athens – video

On Evia, the coastguard mounted a major operation to evacuate hundreds of people by sea, using patrol vessels, fishing and tourist boats and private vessels to rescue residents and holidaymakers overnight and into Friday. Dozens of other villages and neighbourhoods were emptied in the southern Peloponnese region and just north of the Greek capital as blazes raced through pine forests.

"We're talking about the apocalypse, I don't know how [else] to describe it," Sotiris Danikas, head of the coastguard in the town of Aidipsos on Evia, told state broadcaster ERT, describing the sea evacuation.

The coastguard said 668 people had been evacuated from beaches in north-east Evia by early Friday afternoon after flames cut off all other means of escape. Coastguard vessels continued to patrol the coastline.

A coastguard vessel was also rescuing another 10 people trapped on a beach by another fire near the town of Gythio in the southern Peloponnese region.

Greek and European officials have blamed the climate crisis for the multiple fires burning through swaths of southern [Europe](#), from southern Italy to the Balkans, Greece and Turkey. Massive fires have been burning across Siberia in the north of Russia for weeks, while hot, bone-dry, gusty weather has also fuelled devastating wildfires in California, destroying whole towns in some cases.

[Eight dead as wildfires continue to rage across southern Europe](#)

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Greece has been baked by its most protracted heatwave in three decades, with temperatures soaring to 45C (113F). Thousands have fled homes and holiday accommodation, while at least 20 people, including four firefighters, have been treated for injuries. Two of the firefighters were in intensive care in Athens, while another two were in hospital with light burns, the health ministry said.

More than 1,000 firefighters and nearly 20 aircraft are battling huge fires across Greece, while extra firefighters, planes, helicopters and vehicles were arriving from France, Switzerland, Romania, Cyprus, Croatia, Israel and Sweden.

In Turkey, authorities on Friday evacuated six more neighbourhoods near the Mugla province town of Milas as a wildfire fanned by winds burned 3 miles (5km) away from a power plant. At least 36,000 people were evacuated to safety in Mugla province alone, officials said.

Meanwhile, several excavators cleared strips of land to form firebreaks in a bid to stop flames from reaching the Yenikoy power plant, the second such facility to be threatened by wildfires in the region.

Wildfires near the tourism resort of Marmaris, also in Mugla province, were largely contained by late Thursday, officials said, while by Friday afternoon, the two main fires in neighbouring Antalya province were brought under

control and cooling efforts were under way, agriculture and forestry minister Bekir Pakdemirli tweeted.

In Greece, firefighters went door-to-door in areas about 12.5 miles north of Athens telling people to evacuate, while helicopters dropped water on towering flames and thick smoke blanketed the area. Authorities sent push alerts to mobile phones in the area urging residents to leave, while a refugee camp on the outskirts of the capital was evacuated overnight. Constant flare-ups that threatened inhabited areas hampered the work of hundreds of firefighters there.

The fire halted traffic on the country's main highway connecting Athens to northern Greece and damaged electricity installations. The power distribution company announced rolling cuts in the wider capital region to protect the electrical grid.

In the Drosopigi area, resident Giorgos Hatzispiros surveyed the damage to his house on Friday morning, the first time he was seeing it after being ordered to evacuate the previous afternoon. Only the charred walls of the single-storey home remained, along with his children's bicycles, somehow unscathed in a storeroom. Inside, smoke rose from a still-smouldering bookcase.

"Nothing is left," Hatzispiros said. He urged his mother to leave, to spare her the sight of their destroyed home.

In southern Greece, dozens of villages and settlements were evacuated, where a blaze was stopped before reaching monuments at Olympia, birthplace of the ancient Olympic Games.

The fires also disrupted Covid-19 vaccinations. The health ministry announced the suspension of vaccinations at centres in fire-affected areas, saying appointments could be rescheduled when conditions allowed.

In a televised address on Thursday night, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the prime minister, said: "Our priority is always the protection of human life, followed by the protection of property, the natural environment and critical

infrastructure. Unfortunately, under these circumstances, achieving all these aims at the same time is simply impossible.”

He said the wildfires displayed the reality of the climate crisis.

In 2018, more than 100 people died when a fast-moving forest fire engulfed a seaside settlement east of Athens. Some of them drowned trying to escape by sea from the smoke and flames after becoming trapped on a beach.

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UK condemns 10-year sentence for dual national in Iran as tensions rise

British-Iranian labour rights activist's sentencing coincides with deteriorating relations between western allies and Iran



Mehran Raoof a British-Iranian national and labour rights activist who has reportedly been sentenced to 10 years in prison in Tehran. Photograph: Facebook/IASW

Mehran Raoof a British-Iranian national and labour rights activist who has reportedly been sentenced to 10 years in prison in Tehran. Photograph: Facebook/IASW

Agence France-Press and staff

Fri 6 Aug 2021 21.31 EDT

The UK government has hit out at reports that a British-Iranian labour rights activist has been given a sentence of 10 years in Tehran for participating in an outlawed group.

A Foreign Office spokesperson said in a statement on Friday that London “strongly” condemned the sentence handed out to Mehran Raoof, a former teacher from north London.

[Iran sets trial dates for dual nationals before nuclear deal talks in Vienna](#)

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“We continue to do all we can to support Mehran and his family, and continue to raise his case at the most senior levels,” they added.

The response follows an announcement on Wednesday on Twitter by Iranian lawyer Mostafa Nili that both Raoof and a German-Iranian woman, Nahid Taghavi, a retired architect, had been sentenced to 10 years for membership of an illegal group and eight months for anti-government propaganda.

The sentencing of both Iranian dual nationals comes against a backdrop of deteriorating relations between Britain, its western allies and Iran.

On Friday, the [G7](#) group of economically advanced nations accused Iran of orchestrating a drone strike on an Israel-linked tanker that claimed the lives of a former British soldier and a Romanian national.

The United States, Britain and Israel [had already pointed the finger at Iran](#) over the attack on the MV Mercer Street off the coast of Oman.

Iran has strongly denied having any link to the attack, which came as tensions grow in the region and talks to revive the 2015 deal on the Iranian nuclear programme remain at a standstill.

[‘Highly likely’ Iran was behind fatal oil tanker attack – Dominic Raab](#)

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The cases of the dual nationals was seen as a way to increase pressure during the [recent talks on the future of the deal](#). Iran regards its nationals arrested

for breaches of US sanctions as state hostages in the same way the west regards its dual nationals as being picked up purely to increase Iran's bargaining leverage in the nuclear talks.

The families of dual nationals, including British-Iranian woman Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe, have accused Tehran of using their loved ones as pawns in a wider geopolitical standoff with the West.

Earlier this year, Amnesty International called for Raoof's unconditional release, saying he had been arbitrarily detained in Tehran's notorious Evin prison.

The human rights monitor said he was a "prisoner of conscience", who had been helping to translate English-language news articles and discussing workers' rights in Iran, where trade unions are banned.

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WeChat's youth mode is illegal, says lawsuit, as China steps up attack on Tencent

The messaging app does not comply with laws protecting children, say prosecutors, in fresh crackdown on tech firms



A lawsuit in Beijing against a subsidiary of Tencent says prosecutors could support other writs against the Tencent unit. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

A lawsuit in Beijing against a subsidiary of Tencent says prosecutors could support other writs against the Tencent unit. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

Reuters

Fri 6 Aug 2021 23.36 EDT

Prosecutors in Beijing have initiated a civil lawsuit against a subsidiary of Tencent, saying the “youth mode” on the company’s popular social messaging app WeChat does not comply with laws protecting minors.

[No cults, no politics, no ghouls: how China censors the video game world](#)

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The lawsuit was initiated on Friday by Beijing’s Haidian district people’s procuratorate against Shenzhen Tencent Computer Systems, according to a filing posted on JCRB.com, a website run by China’s top prosecutor, Reuters reported.

The document did not say how WeChat’s “youth mode” broke Chinese law. It said it could support other agencies and organisations that intended to bring lawsuits against the Tencent unit and asked them to contact the prosecutor’s office within 30 days.

Tencent did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

WeChat’s “youth mode”, when turned on, limits young users’ access to some games and functions, such as payments or finding nearby friends.

Chinese authorities have called for minors to be better protected from online dangers, a sentiment echoed by state media this week which criticised the video gaming industry as well as online platforms that help promote celebrity culture.

[Tencent curbs on gaming time will shock markets but please many parents](#)

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Tencent on Tuesday [announced new curbs on minors’ access to its flagship video game](#), Honor of Kings, after its shares were battered by a state media article that described online games as “spiritual opium”.

Reuters reported in April that China was preparing a substantial fine for Tencent as part of its sweeping antitrust clampdown on the country's internet giants. But it is likely to be less than the record \$2.75 billion penalty imposed on Alibaba.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Fifth of Covid hospital admissions are aged 18-34, says NHS England

Chief executive urges young people to get vaccinated, with pop-up clinics and walk-in sites available

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Nurses in an intensive care unit in London. While 5.4% of Covid patients were 18-34 during the winter wave, that figure rose to more than 20% in July. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Nurses in an intensive care unit in London. While 5.4% of Covid patients were 18-34 during the winter wave, that figure rose to more than 20% in July. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Rachel Hall

@rachela_hall

Thu 5 Aug 2021 11.36 EDT

More than one-fifth of people admitted to hospital with Covid-19 are aged between 18 and 34, according to the new NHS [England](#) boss, who is urging young people not to delay getting vaccinated.

The [NHS](#) England chief executive, Amanda Pritchard, said the proportion of patients aged 18-34 in hospital had nearly quadrupled from 5.4% at the peak of the winter wave in January to reach more than 20% last month, with 5,000 seriously ill in hospital.

On Thursday there were 30,215 new cases of coronavirus, while there were 86 deaths reported within 28 days of a positive test.

Pritchard warned that young people “are not immune and the best way they can protect themselves absolutely is to get that vaccine if they haven’t already”.

In an [interview with the BBC](#) she added that the NHS was making it “as easy as possible to protect yourself, your family and your friends”, with pop-up clinics and walk-in sites adding to the 1,600 permanent sites already in place.

Take-up of the vaccine [has been slowing](#) among young people in recent weeks, with some feeling that the benefits do not outweigh concerns about side-effects or the hassle of obtaining an appointment.

Last week, doctors warned that [increasing numbers of young people](#) with coronavirus were being admitted to hospital – including to intensive care wards. Case rates are highest for people in their 20s. In that week, about

250,000 18- to 30-year-olds had their first or second dose of a Covid vaccine.

Experts have called for clearer information and messages from role models to persuade the remaining third of 18- to 34-year-olds to take up their jab.

New university students moving into halls of residence are considered a priority before the new term to avoid repeats of the coronavirus outbreaks that took place last year, which resulted in thousands of students being locked down in small rooms. Last month, ministers were considering making vaccine passports obligatory for students, but they later abandoned the idea.

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Pritchard said the vaccine programme was having a “major impact” in keeping people out of hospital and saving an estimated 60,000 lives.

She said: “Thanks to the hard work of NHS staff and volunteers, almost nine in 10 adults have had their first Covid-19 vaccination and more than 32

million have now had both jabs as part of the biggest and most successful vaccination drive in health service history.”

Pritchard, who was previously NHS England’s chief operating officer, took over as chief executive from Simon Stevens on 1 August.

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Vaccines to be required for open travel ‘for evermore’, says Shapps

Minister suggests quarantine rules for some arrivals in England will remain in place into autumn

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00:57

Vaccinated Britons can travel 'without looking over their shoulder', says Shapps – video

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

Thu 5 Aug 2021 08.29 EDT

Britons will need to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 “for evermore” in order to travel between countries, the transport secretary has predicted, suggesting that quarantine restrictions for some arrivals in [England](#) will remain in place into the autumn.

Grant Shapps said it was vital to “protect the domestic unlocking” after the [latest changes were announced](#) to the traffic light system that grades destinations according to their case, vaccine and variant numbers.

[Fully vaccinated UK arrivals from France will not need to quarantine](#)

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Shapps predicted people would be required to prove they had been fully vaccinated for some time to come, telling BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "It is a reality that in this new world, we're living with coronavirus ... I think double vaccination or full vaccination is going to be a feature for evermore, and probably all countries will require full vaccination for you to enter."

He said in an ideal world ministers would not have to impose quarantine restrictions or demand people pay money for multiple, expensive tests, but said the current system was likely to remain in place after summer.

That was because the threat of [vaccine escape](#) – meaning a variant emerging that current vaccines are less effective against – was the big worry on ministers' minds, Shapps said.

"It would be irresponsible for us not, therefore, to be testing people when they do travel before they leave and when they get back – that's how you can guard against the next big variant that none of us know about yet," he said.

"So I think we'll have to settle down into knowing that this will happen, but as the world opens up and international rules are adopted for travel, which will certainly include full vaccination, I think things will start to become more routine for people who travel."

Shapps said quarantine restrictions did not block the importation of variants completely, but said slowing down their arrival was helpful.

In a boost for holidaymakers, France is being moved from the "amber plus" list to the normal amber list while a handful of countries are going on the green list, including Germany, Romania and Norway.

Travel hubs including the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and India are also being bumped up and put on the regular amber list, while Georgia, Mexico, Réunion and Mayotte will be added to the red list, with all changes taking effect from 4am on Sunday 8 August.

Shapps defended having singled out France as the only amber list country where travellers still had to quarantine for up to 10 days regardless of whether they had been fully vaccinated, after the foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, had suggested it was partly due to the number of cases of the [Beta variant](#) in Réunion, a French overseas territory thousands of miles away from mainland France.

He said there were “very close links” between Réunion and France, meaning high levels of the Beta variant on the island in the Indian Ocean had spilled over into the mainland’s north, but that these had since “descended”.

Some scientists called for clarity on the latest changes to travel restrictions.

Martin McKee, a professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said it was still far from clear what criteria the government was using to make these decisions. “This is especially problematic when some of them seem to defy logic and when the explanations that ministers give suggest some fundamental geographical and epidemiological misunderstandings.”

Prof Susan Michie, the director of the Centre for Behaviour Change at University College London and a government adviser on behavioural science, also called for greater clarity from ministers. “The confusion and changes over travel guidance give mixed messages about the riskiness of the pandemic and of travel and undermine confidence in government strategy,” she said.

Another government adviser, Prof Stephen Reicher from the University of St Andrews, said the changes were risky. “My fear is that we are forgetting the lessons of last year,” he said, noting that last summer with schools off, universities off, people on holiday and socialising outdoors, infection levels were driven down to very low daily levels in early August.

International travel should be discouraged in general this year, but given some people need to travel for family and other reasons, it is key to ensure things are fair and equitable for those who must travel, he added.

However, Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia, said limiting international travel only served to delay the spread of an infectious disease when combined with rigid restrictions within the destination country. “Given the status of our own epidemic I can see very little benefits of not moving many European countries on to the green list,” he said.

Labour pressed the government to be more transparent about how it reached decisions about which list each country is put on.

Jim McMahon, the shadow transport secretary, said ministers should “get a grip and set out a proper strategy, provide full data, and progress work with global partners on international vaccine passports so travellers and the industry can have clarity instead of reckless U-turns and confusion”.

Yasmin Qureshi, the Labour MP for Bolton, said it was “complete discrimination” that countries including Pakistan and Turkey remained on the red list.

She said the UAE and Qatar had been upgraded to the amber list because they were “very rich” and the same had happened to India because it was a large country the UK wanted to do deals with. She said Pakistan was “not a country that was going to achieve our rates of vaccination”, telling Sky News it did not make sense to block most travel with the south Asian country.

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Road transport

Cargo bikes deliver faster and cleaner than vans, study finds

Home deliveries are soaring and cargo bikes cut congestion and pollution in cities, researchers say



An electric cargo bike delivers flowers in south London. Photograph: Gill Allen/Rex/Shutterstock

An electric cargo bike delivers flowers in south London. Photograph: Gill Allen/Rex/Shutterstock

Damian Carrington Environment editor

@dpcarrington

Thu 5 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Electric cargo bikes deliver about 60% faster than vans in city centres, according to a study. It found that bikes had a higher average speed and dropped off 10 parcels an hour, compared with six for vans.

The bikes also cut carbon emissions by 90% compared with diesel vans, and by a third compared with electric vans, the report said. Air pollution, which is still at illegal levels in many urban areas, was also significantly reduced.

Home deliveries have soared in recent years, spurred by online shopping and the coronavirus pandemic. Vans can travel along clear stretches of road at higher speeds than cargo bikes but are slowed by congestion and the search for parking. Cargo bikes bypass traffic jams, take shortcuts through streets closed to through traffic and ride to the customers door.

Carbon emissions from transport have [barely fallen in the past decade](#) and pose a significant challenge for the UK in meeting its targets to combat the climate crisis. The government recently announced [a 30% rise in funding to make cycling and walking easier](#). The report's authors said the government should consider cutting the VAT rate on cargo bike deliveries and allow more powerful e-bikes to be used.

“Recent estimates from Europe suggest that up to [51% of all freight journeys in cities](#) could be replaced by cargo bike,” said Ersilia Verlinghieri at the Active Travel Academy at the University of Westminster and lead author of the report. “So it’s remarkable to see that, if even just a portion of this shift were to happen in London, it would be accompanied by not only dramatic reduction of CO2 emissions, but also contribute to a considerable reduction of risks from air pollution and road traffic collisions, whilst ensuring an efficient, fast and reliable urban freight system.”

Hirra Khan Adeogun at the climate charity Possible, which commissioned the report with funding from the KR Foundation, said: “We’ve seen home deliveries skyrocket during the Covid lockdowns and that trend is likely to continue. We urgently need to put on the brakes and reevaluate how goods move through our cities. Cargo bikes are one solution that we need to get behind.”

The [study used GPS data from the cargo bike company Pedal Me](#), which operates within a nine-mile radius of central London. The researchers compared deliveries on 100 randomly chosen days across the seasons with the routes that vans would have taken to get the parcels to customers. They

found the cargo bikes saved nearly four tonnes of CO2 across the period, even when accounting for the food the riders consumed.

“These benefits are not just specific to London, with the 100,000 cargo bikes introduced in Europe between 2018 and 2020 estimated to be saving, each month, the same amount of CO2 needed to fly about 24,000 people from London to New York and back,” the report said. Other research has shown that cargo bikes are more cost-effective than vans when delivery distances and parcel sizes are small.

Electric vans are becoming more common, but still make up a very small number of the 4m vans on the road, 96% of which were diesel in 2019. Vans and HGVs were also involved in one in three fatal collisions in London between 2015 to 2017.

Steve Gooding, the director of the RAC Foundation, said: “When we last looked into van use we found that while delivery vehicles made up only a small part of the van fleet they covered a disproportionately high number of miles.

“While businesses are driven by economics, they are increasingly being held to account for their environmental and safety performance too. Cargo bikes will tick – and carry – a number of boxes for companies looking to thread their wares through our crowded city streets, and so help us all breathe more easily.”

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Tokyo 2020 Olympics: Thiam wins heptathlon, Belgium win hockey – as it happened!

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[Katarina Johnson-Thompson](#)

‘I wasn’t leaving in a wheelchair’: Johnson-Thompson on Olympics agony

- World champion heptathlete reveals injury despair
- ‘I don’t know how to explain how I feel’



Katarina Johnson-Thompson hobbles down the finishing straight after pulling up in the heptathlon 200m. Photograph: Petr David Josek/AP

Katarina Johnson-Thompson hobbles down the finishing straight after pulling up in the heptathlon 200m. Photograph: Petr David Josek/AP

[Sean Ingle](#) at Tokyo Olympic Stadium

[@seaningle](#)

Thu 5 Aug 2021 04.35 EDT

Katarina Johnson-Thompson, whose Olympic heptathlon dreams ended when [she tore a calf muscle while in medal contention on Wednesday](#), has said that refusing to get in a wheelchair despite being in pain was a last gesture of defiance after a tough year.

The world champion said she believed she could still win a medal despite [missing six months of training](#) until disaster struck in the 200m. But even after her injury she kept hobbling to the line, in echoes of Derek Redmond at the 1992 Olympics.

[Katarina Johnson-Thompson's medal hopes end with injury in heptathlon](#)

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“I started the year in a wheelchair and I was not willing to end my Olympic campaign the same way,” she wrote on Twitter.

“I don’t know where to begin in trying to explain how I feel,” she said. “Only a handful of people understand what I have been through. An even smaller amount understand the mental and physical challenges I’ve faced trying to make it back in time through a pandemic after my achilles rupture at the back end of December.

“To make it to the line was a miracle, not only to do that but to be on my way to putting a decent score together is heartbreakingly. I truly believed I was capable of winning a medal despite having up to half a year of missed training.”

Some criticised her decision to come to Tokyo after so little training or competition, but the 28-year-old had no regrets.

“More than ever I’m proud that I showed up, put myself out there and tried,” said Johnson-Thompson, who had looked likely to end day one of the competition in the medal positions. “It would have been very easy to shy away and pull out, to say I wasn’t ready and blame the injury, but I’m not that type of athlete or person.

“I am a fighter. I’m gritty AF and I find it extremely hard to give up. I can’t rest easy knowing I applied myself every single day and pushed until I couldn’t push any more.

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“I’ve sacrificed so much, moving my entire life to France five years ago, away from my family and friends. I’ve lost heart knowing that the work my team and I have done for these last eight months was for this outcome and I hate that my story has played out in more heartbreak.

“I’ve been knocked so many times and got back up, but it will take a lot of time for me to process this reality. I appreciate the kind messages. Thank you x.”

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Indonesia Covid deaths pass 100,000 as Delta overwhelms hospitals

Frustrations with government response and anti-vaxxers as country struggles to cope with variant

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A Covid victim being buried at the special section of Jombang public cemetery reserved for those who died of the coronavirus, on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia. Photograph: Tatan Syuflana/AP

A Covid victim being buried at the special section of Jombang public cemetery reserved for those who died of the coronavirus, on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia. Photograph: Tatan Syuflana/AP

Caleb Quinley

Thu 5 Aug 2021 05.04 EDT

Indonesia's health ministry has recorded 1,747 new deaths of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, pushing the nation's total deaths to 100,636.

The south-east Asian country has been struggling to cope with the highly contagious Delta variant since it was first discovered in Indonesia in late June. According to [Our World in Data](#), Indonesia's total number of infections has now reached 3.53 million.

The country recorded a huge rise in cases at the beginning of July, and more than 30,100 deaths. High fatality numbers have left much of the country frustrated with their government, blaming a slow vaccine rollout, while others point blame at conspiracy theorists and anti-vaxxers.

“Living and dying is part of the life cycle,” says Rommy Stefanus, 39, who lives in Jakarta with his family. “But I do believe this [the deaths] can be reduced if our government is more responsive in handling this matter.”

Stefanus, who works in logistics, feels that the Indonesian government was not effective at making early decisions such as sectioning off areas where outbreaks occurred could have slowed the spread of the Delta variant. Instead, he said, it created a climate of distrust between the authorities and the local population.

[Indonesia: number of coronavirus deaths per day](#)

“It’s frustrating, because again, the government is not strict about this [implementing the lockdown] either,” Stefanus said. “They close some roads, put some police in place, but at certain times they just let people pass. In the end, people are trying to outsmart the authorities.” Stefanus also highlighted a concern with conspiracies surrounding the virus. He said many Indonesians do not consider it a serious health concern, and see it as a hoax.

It is a sentiment shared by Arry Susanto, 50, a local film-maker living in South Sumatra.

The people who deny this pandemic situation are to blame,” Susanto said. “Because of them, the death count keeps rising.”

Many medical professionals say hospitals are grappling to treat new patients as the healthcare system becomes increasingly overwhelmed. Hundreds are now dying in their own homes.

“It is very rare that patients come and get into the ICU directly,” Lia Partakusuma, the secretary general of the Indonesia Hospital Association, [told the Associated Press](#).

“Many of them refuse to wait in the emergency unit, maybe they feel uncomfortable, so they decide to go back home,” she said.

The crisis has pushed local volunteers to treat the sick at their homes, putting their own lives at risk. These paramedics have been rushing coronavirus victims from their homes to hospitals when their condition becomes severe.

Indonesia implemented [a lockdown on 1 July](#). Since the increased restrictions began last month, the country has seen pockets of improvement, particularly in Java and Bali where cases have dropped slightly. But the government moved to [extend the lockdown](#) for another week as a precaution.

The government has begun ramping up its vaccination programme in order to get ahead of the rising numbers. It has also taken steps to increase oxygen production for medical use and set up field hospitals throughout the country, according to local reports.

But even as safety measures are increased, locals like Susanto feel the rising deaths have led to a collective sense of despair.

“We’re really sad and frustrated with all the news regarding the death count,” he said. “In my neighbourhood in Bandar Lampung, almost every morning we hear the obituary announced from our village mosque.”

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New South Wales

Sydney suffers worst day of pandemic with 262 Covid cases and five deaths as Delta spreads north

Beach party in Newcastle triggers snap lockdown in Hunter and Upper Hunter, while virus found in sewage puts Armidale and Dubbo on high alert

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02:57

NSW Covid update: 262 new cases and five deaths as Hunter and upper Hunter go into lockdown – video

[Anne Davies](#)

[@annefdavies](#)

Thu 5 Aug 2021 01.27 EDT

A beach party in Newcastle attended by young people from western Sydney has triggered a snap lockdown in eight regional local government areas as [New South Wales](#) authorities worry that the Delta variant of Covid is now spreading in the regions.

NSW recorded 262 coronavirus cases and five deaths in the 24 hours to 8pm Wednesday – its worst day so far in the pandemic. At least 72 cases were in the community for all or part of their infectious period.

But it is the detection of fragments of the virus in sewage systems in Armidale and Dubbo as well as in the Newcastle and the Central Coast that has authorities most worried.

There had been low levels detected in Armidale previously, which were thought to have come from an old case, but the levels have now increased to levels similar to those in Newcastle.

[NSW Covid lockdown restrictions: update to Sydney and regional NSW coronavirus rules explained](#)

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There are also concerns about spread into the north coast because of its proximity to south-east Queensland where there have been cases.

NSW authorities said a beach party at Blacksmiths beach which occurred last Friday appeared to be the link to five cases in the Newcastle area.

Strict lockdown restrictions will come into force at 5pm on Thursday for the areas of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Port Stephens, Cessnock, Dungog, Singleton and Muswellbrook.

More than half a million people in those areas will be restricted from leaving their homes for a week, except to get essential supplies or undertake essential jobs.

Outdoor gatherings were legal in Newcastle last weekend, which is outside the greater [Sydney](#) lockdown area. But an unknown number of young people travelled up from the hotspot of western Sydney to attend, and have infected at people at the gathering.

The Maitland Christian school was closed on Thursday for deep cleaning after two students attended the party.

The library at the University of Newcastle has been listed as an exposure site on 30 July from 5pm to 11pm as has Target at Glendale shopping village on 1 August from 8.50am to 1pm. More sites were expected on Thursday afternoon.

There is also one case linked to the Blacksmiths beach gathering who resides on the Central Coast. There are a further eight unrelated cases on the Central Coast, all within one household.

“Can I just thank the people involved? Not that I want to see gatherings, but I also want people to tell us the truth,” the NSW chief health officer, Kerry Chant, said.

“If they’ve made a wrong judgment, if they’ve taken a course of action that they regret, please tell us the truth because that will allow us to find out who was there and stop any chains of transmission,” she said.

As a result of the outbreak, the premier, [Gladys Berejiklian](#), said the federal government had agreed to release a further 150,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine to NSW which will be deployed to the regions in the week of 16 August.



People wait for the AstraZeneca vaccine at the pop-up, walk-in clinic at the Michael Wenden Aquatic Leisure Centre in Miller in Sydney's south-west. Photograph: Brook Mitchell/Getty Images

The NSW government has been diverting Pfizer doses away from regional NSW in order to begin a mass vaccination of 21,000 students from the eight hotspot LGAs in western and south-western Sydney from 9 August. All will be given Pfizer shots.

“I want to thank the prime minister for those extra doses on top of what we’ve already been allocated. That will make a big difference in us containing the spread,” Berejiklian said.

Despite the vaccination drive, the government is preparing to walk back from its plans to have year 12 students return to face-to-face learning on 16 August. The premier emphasised her determination that all students will be able to complete their HSC.

[Latest NSW Health Covid exposure sites: full list and map of Sydney hotspots and regional coronavirus case locations](#)

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“A key priority of our government is to make sure every student can sit the HSC. It’s a legal requirement for every student to sit a public examination process. We want to make sure every child from those eight local government areas has the opportunity to do their best, to be their best, not only to protect them against the virus and protect their family but also to go through the HSC process,” she said.

She said she would make more announcements in coming days.

As well as a record number of cases, the number of deaths has spiked.

Five people died in intensive care units in the 24 hours to 8pm Wednesday. Four were unvaccinated and one had had one dose of AstraZeneca in late May. Their ages ranged from 60s to 80s.

There are now 51 cases in ICU, with one in their teens, three in their 20s, five in their 30s and five in their 40s. Some 46 of the ICU cases were unvaccinated, while the remaining five had had one dose.

The premier again urged everyone to seek a vaccination and foreshadowed that vaccination could be one of the criteria to allow some businesses to reopen in the future.

02:11

Brad Hazzard chides 'negative' questions from media and then praises Daily Telegraph – video

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[New Zealand](#)

Google co-founder Larry Page granted entry to New Zealand despite border closure, report says

Billionaire reportedly made trip after his child fell ill in Fiji and needed hospital treatment in New Zealand



Google co-founder Larry Page has reportedly visited New Zealand during the pandemic, despite the border being closed to non-residents. Photograph: John G Mabanglo/EPA

Google co-founder Larry Page has reportedly visited New Zealand during the pandemic, despite the border being closed to non-residents. Photograph: John G Mabanglo/EPA

Eva Corlett in Wellington

Wed 4 Aug 2021 22.30 EDT

The billionaire co-founder of Google Larry Page was reportedly granted entry into [New Zealand](#), despite the border being closed to non-residents.

[Stuff reported](#) that Page, who is the sixth-richest person in the world, visited the country after his child fell ill in Fiji and required hospital treatment in New Zealand.

New Zealand businessman and multimillionaire Sir Stephen Tindall, who knows Page, said the billionaire has spent the Covid-19 pandemic in Fiji.

He told Stuff Page's young child required treatment at Auckland's Starship children's hospital. The visit took place "quite a while ago".

New Zealand has [extremely strict border controls](#) in place, requiring returnees to spend two weeks in a government-run Managed Isolation and Quarantine Facility (MIQ), in order to sustain its Covid-19 elimination strategy.

[‘No roadmap’: New Zealand mulls reopening options after a year of closed borders](#)

[Read more](#)

Entry is so tough that desperate New Zealand citizens are [complaining of extreme difficulty](#) in securing a place in managed isolation.

Entry is mostly reserved for New Zealand citizens and permanent residents, but special approvals can be made if someone needs to travel for "critical purposes", including health reasons. This category requires approval from the Ministry of Health or a District Health Board.

Immigration NZ said that Page met the requirements to be approved entry into New Zealand, despite not being a permanent resident. It did not reveal if Page is a New Zealand citizen.

Immigration NZ refused to comment further on the case, including the grounds for approving his entry and whether he was required to spend two weeks in managed isolation, citing privacy concerns.

Prime minister Jacinda Ardern told reporters this morning she was not aware Page had been in New Zealand.

“Nor would I be,” Ardern said. “We have roughly, in any given year, roughly 100 medevacs into New Zealand. The decision for a patient to be part of a medevac is made by clinicians.

“I’m not advised of every single individual … at any given time because politicians do not make those decisions, nor should they.”

Ardern said she trusted clinicians to make decisions about what was best for a patient, and that it was not necessarily important for her to know someone’s private medical details.

The Ministry of Health also refused to comment on individual patients or whether Page required an urgent flight.

But it said anyone requesting a medevac flight by definition required immediate treatment, and therefore do not undergo managed isolation.

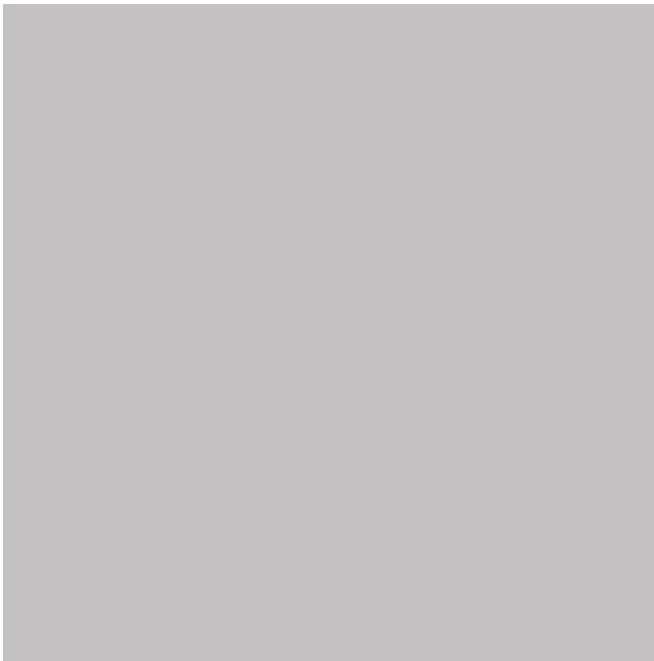
In the year ending 30 June, 99 patients had been accepted for medical treatment via medevac flights, with most people living in the Pacific Islands, the ministry said.

The Guardian has requested comment from Page and Tindall.

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Prof Paul Gilroy near his home in north London. Photograph: Eddie Otchere/The Guardian

[The long read](#)

The last humanist: how Paul Gilroy became the most vital guide to our age of crisis

Prof Paul Gilroy near his home in north London. Photograph: Eddie Otchere/The Guardian

One of Britain's most influential scholars has spent a lifetime trying to convince people to take race and racism seriously. Are we finally ready to listen?

by [Yohann Koshy](#)

Thu 5 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

In 2000, the race equality thinktank the Runnymede Trust published a report about the “future of multi-ethnic Britain”. Launched by the Labour home secretary Jack Straw, it proposed ways to counter racial discrimination and rethink British identity. The report was nuanced and scholarly, the result of two years’ deliberation. It was honest about Britain’s racial inequalities and the legacy of empire, but also offered hope. It made the case for formally declaring the UK a multicultural society.

The newspapers tore it to pieces. The Daily Telegraph ran a front-page article: “Straw wants to rewrite our history: ‘British’ is a racist word, says report.” The Sun and the Daily Mail joined in. The line was clear – a clique of leftwing academics, in cahoots with the government, wanted to make ordinary people feel ashamed of their country. In the Telegraph, Boris Johnson, then editor of the Spectator magazine, wrote that the report represented “a war over culture, which our side could lose”. Spooked by the intensity of the reaction, Straw distanced himself from any further debate about Britishness, recommending in his speech at the report’s launch that the left swallow some patriotic tonic.

The [Parekh report](#), as it was known – its chair was the political theorist Lord Bhikhu Parekh – was not a radical document. It was studiously considerate.

Contrary to the Telegraph front page, it didn't claim "British" was a racist word. It said that "Britishness, as much as Englishness, has ... largely unspoken, racial connotations". This was the sentence that launched a thousand tirades, but where did this idea come from? Follow the footnote in the offending paragraph and you arrive at the work of an academic called Paul Gilroy.

Gilroy watched this "depressing and deeply symptomatic" episode unfold from across the Atlantic. He had joined Yale University the previous year, having left Britain in search of greener pastures. Several other non-white British academics had done the same: an article in the Guardian from 2000 about this exodus – headlined "[Gifted, black ... and gone](#)" – quotes one of Gilroy's reasons for leaving: "Even to be interested in race, let alone to assert its centrality to British nationalism, is to sacrifice the right to be taken seriously." The response to the Parekh report seemed to confirm that he had made the right decision. Twenty years later, it can feel like little has changed. Time moves forward but, on this issue, Britain stays still, having the same arguments over and over.

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Gilroy, 65, has since returned to Britain. Today, he is widely regarded as the country's pre-eminent scholar of race, culture and nationalism. It's a status that he has acquired slowly, without fanfare, through a steady drip of books, essays and lectures rather than dramatic public interventions. Over four decades his work has spanned disciplines – literature, history, philosophy, music, sociology – but it is built around a simple plea: that race and racism be taken seriously.

He first made a name for himself in the late 1980s with his book *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, which argued that racism was "deeply interwoven" with nationalism in Britain. His 1993 follow-up, *The Black Atlantic*, still his most influential work, used the writings of enslaved people and their descendants to demonstrate their centrality to the making of the modern world. In 2004's *After Empire*, more than a decade before the referendum on EU membership, he diagnosed Britain with "postcolonial

melancholia”: an inability to mourn the loss of imperial greatness, which was encouraging a corrosive nationalism.

Gilroy is a worldly scholar, who wants us to look beyond the nation-state and think on a planetary scale. He has been working for several years on a book about the effects that the climate crisis is having on our ideas about race and humanity. But he can’t quite get Britain – or England, really – off his mind. In our conversations over recent months, he circled around the virulent nationalism that accompanied the UK’s exit from the EU, the [inhumanity of the Home Office](#)’s policy toward migrants, and the renewal of the far-right political forces that he encountered as a young person in postwar London, when he, like so many others, was intimidated by racists in the street. “I really tried to warn people about racism and nationalism in this country,” he told me, toward the end of one interview, when Brexit came up. “To have all of those things that could be seen so clearly swell up into this Leviathan and beat everything that I think is important and beautiful and serious and democratic about this culture to death … It has given me one or two things to think about.”

In this moment of resurgent anti-racist politics, people are turning to Gilroy’s work. An activist told me that she saw a placard listing the names of essential thinkers at a [Rhodes Must Fall demonstration](#) in Oxford – and Gilroy was the only living person on it. When the Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton shared a #BlackLivesMatter reading list on social media, he included There Ain’t No Black ..., alongside works by Malcolm X and Maya Angelou. Steve McQueen’s acclaimed TV series about Caribbean life in Britain, [Small Axe](#), is further evidence of his influence: Gilroy was credited as an adviser. “He’s the foremost intellectual in the United Kingdom: not an if, not a but, not a maybe,” McQueen, a friend of Gilroy’s, told me over the phone.

He may not have the public profile of someone like the late [Stuart Hall](#), who co-supervised his PhD, but Gilroy’s reputation in the field is unrivalled. People who work on race speak of his deep, formative influence; concepts that he developed such as the “black Atlantic” – which refers to the transnational slave-descended cultures that span Africa, Europe and the Americas – are firmly embedded in academia. In 2019, he was awarded [the Holberg prize](#), a \$700,000 award funded by the Norwegian government that

is often called the Nobel prize of the humanities. (Not a single British newspaper covered it.) The awarding committee described him as “one of the most challenging and inventive figures in contemporary scholarship”.

Too challenging, perhaps. For all the plaudits, there is something unsettling about Gilroy’s way of looking at the world. He is an untimely figure. His ideas don’t correspond to the vogueish pieties of identity politics or even cutting-edge studies of race. He is that most intellectually unfashionable thing, a humanist. And despite his insistence on understanding the importance of race, he has paradoxically spent much of his life encouraging people to work towards something radical, even utopian: moving beyond the idea of race altogether.

Gilroy does not like the spotlight. He was hesitant about being the subject of a profile, and friends of his seemed surprised when I told them that he had eventually agreed. There were moments in our conversations when he would artfully direct me away from personal questions or reflect wincingly on something he’d once said. He seemed wary of what happens to a life when it is turned into a narrative, the way it can be smoothed into something neat, familiar and false. In his work, he has always condemned the tendency to reduce the world to comfortingly simple categories.

When we first met in person, in between pandemic lockdowns last winter in Finsbury Park, north London, Gilroy was easy to spot between the dog-walkers and morning joggers. He is short and bearish, and has a crown of dreadlocks, wisped with grey, reaching down to his waist. Dressed in black, wearing mud-stained walking boots – a partisan Londoner, he is also an outdoors person – he moved across the sodden grass with careful, almost monkish purpose. In conversation, he speaks fluently, gently, like a late-night DJ soothing listeners as they drive, but his tone belies a barbed impatience with the state of things. “I can’t watch videos of murder,” he said in a recent [discussion](#) with the historian David Olusoga, referring to the killing of George Floyd. “I’m already angry enough.” Racism, nationalism, intellectual complacency: these disfigure the world and move him, and this hasn’t waned as he’s grown older.

His mother, Beryl Gilroy, was a teacher, psychotherapist and novelist. She migrated from what was then British Guiana in the Caribbean in 1952, but she wasn't an immigrant: like the rest of the Windrush generation, she was a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies, moving from one part of the empire to another. If that cohort was expecting a measure of hospitality, they found a hostile environment. "Unable to adjust to the presence of semi-strangers who, disarmingly, knew British culture intimately as a result of their colonial education, and who represented a vanished pre-eminence," her son would later write, "the country developed a melancholic attachment to its lost imperial past."



Graffiti in support of Enoch Powell in 1968. Photograph: Evening Standard/Getty Images

This was the era of the colour bar, when those newly arrived discovered the hollowness of their formal rights. Landlords would refuse to rent rooms based on what the neighbours might think. The graffiti – "Keep Britain White", "[Enoch] Powell for PM" – put things more plainly. So, too did the violence: from the police, the marauding teddy boys, and the assailants, never caught, behind the murder of the Antiguan carpenter [Kelso Cochrane](#) in 1959.

In her 1976 memoir [Black Teacher](#), Beryl Gilroy described what it was like to navigate the education system of postwar London. She encountered parents who didn't want a black woman teaching their children, and had to deal with racism from the pupils themselves, who were often parroting their parents. Life among the “workaday English” often amounted to a “daily struggle for survival and dignity”, but she was unflappable, eventually becoming the headteacher at Beckford primary school in north London.

In one scene of the memoir, though, we see her stalked by self-doubt. She worries about the child she is carrying, who was the product of what was once called “miscegenation”, the mixing of races. Her husband, Pat Gilroy – a trained chemist and a communist, who left the party after Moscow’s tanks rolled into Hungary in 1956 – was white. “Might there not be some flaws in the chromosomes?” she wonders, against her better instincts. “After I had defeated an army of nightmares my fears subsided, but I remember to this day the anxiety with which I first examined my son, seeking some flaw, born of a fear buried deep down inside me.”

With a white father and a black mother, Paul – named after Paul Dienes, a Hungarian intellectual and friend of his father’s – knew early on that he was different, and that sameness was overrated. Gilroy is not forthcoming about his childhood. He resisted the story that seemed to be taking shape as I asked him about it: the scholar of race who was drawn to the subject because of the racism he experienced as a child. “I am so phobic about the cult of victim-speak that I don’t want to narrate my life in that way,” he told me.

Those formative moments can’t be erased, either. In the introduction to his book *Between Camps*, he recalls a childhood memory of coming across the painted insignia of the British Union of Fascists, Oswald Moseley’s political party, on a wall in bombed-out London. What was this doing in a country that had only recently helped defeat nazism? “I think that was a stimulus to begin a kind of critical reflection on the power of racism and fascism and nationalism in British life,” he said. “It was literally having my face rubbed in all that shit.”

As a teenager, Gilroy was drawn to the affirmative politics of black power, grew out an afro, and immersed himself in soul and funk. “We people, who are darker than blue,” Curtis Mayfield, sang at Finsbury Park’s Rainbow

theatre in 1972, with a teenage Gilroy in attendance. “Are we gonna stand around this town / And let what others say come true?”

His mother didn’t always make him to go to school because she knew the kind of things teachers said about kids like him. Instead, he would read voraciously, often at the local library in North Finchley. Through his mother, he discovered books – such as *The Souls of Black Folk* by the African American polymath WEB Du Bois – that he would wrestle with for the rest of his life.

Gilroy failed his English O-level exam, having gone out the night before to see the American singer-songwriter Boz Scaggs play at the Roundhouse in Camden. But he ended up at Sussex University, where, browsing the university bookshop one day, he came across a collection of essays, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. “I thumbed through it and thought, wow,” he told me. Until then, he hadn’t realised that scholars wrote about things like football, or pop music, or Caribbean culture. Now, after this encounter, academia seemed bigger, closer to life itself. Maybe, he thought, there might be a place for him.

The book that had captured Gilroy’s imagination came from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, one of the few institutions producing academic work that made sense of what Britain looked like from ground-level. The CCCS was under the directorship of [Stuart Hall](#), the pioneering Jamaican intellectual who famously coined the term Thatcherism and transformed British leftwing thought by focusing on the importance of culture.

When Gilroy joined the centre as a postgraduate student in 1978, he found that it had an egalitarian ethos; the traditional hierarchy dividing students from teachers was undermined. In 1982, he and a number of his fellow students published a text, *The Empire Strikes Back*, a landmark in the field of British cultural studies. Its central theme, developing Hall’s work, was that the hard-right nationalism of the emergent 80s was being secured through appeals to racist fears.

The 80s were a heady decade, in which battles over belonging were constantly being fought. While the far right whipped up support by promising to “repatriate” them, Gilroy’s generation affirmed that they were “here to stay and here to fight”, as one leftwing group put it. His was a cohort, actually born in Britain, that was “equipped with a sense of entitlement that their parents had not been able to enjoy”, as Gilroy later wrote. They were called the rebel generation for a reason: the [1981 riots](#), in places like Brixton and Toxteth, were a revolt against police harassment, and it was thanks to them that Gilroy found employment after leaving Birmingham. “Suddenly there were jobs in local government in new areas around policing, equal opportunities, around women’s needs and experiences,” he said. He worked at the Greater London Council (GLC), the city authority under the radical-left leadership of Ken Livingstone, where Gilroy did research for a unit that monitored the Metropolitan police.

He also gigged as a freelance journalist, writing for the counter-cultural music press. He got into prickly debates about jazz in the pages of the Wire and [interviewed James Baldwin](#) for City Limits. (“I never got on with the English in general,” Baldwin told him, “People who believe that an elderly British matron is the Empress of the Indies and Queen of all Africa are dangerously removed from reality.”) He was finding it hard to enter academia. “I wasn’t perceived as somebody who was staying within the bounds of the acceptable limits of scholarly research. A lot of the hostility came from people on the so-called left,” he said.



A soundsystem in west London in 1983. Photograph: Peter Anderson/Pymca/Rex/Shutterstock

His first book, *There Ain't No Black ...*, published in 1987, was like a little grenade thrown into the discourse. His targets included English Marxists who couldn't understand the importance of thinking carefully about race; sociologists who portrayed Britain's black population as either victims or criminals; the "new racism" of Thatcher's Britain; and even the GLC, his old employer. In the book, Gilroy took riots and social movements to be as politically significant as any political party or trade union. "My brain kind of cracked open when I read it," Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the celebrated American theorist of prison abolition, told me.

It is the second chapter that furnished the ideas that would, during the Parekh affair, offend the rightwing press. Gilroy marshalled a long list of examples – pervasive phrases such as "the island race" and "bulldog breed"; the way politicians spoke about immigrants as aliens; laws that privileged immigrants with a grandparent born in the British Isles – to argue that race and nation were enmeshed in the British psyche. The government's obsession with repatriating "illegal immigrants" was further evidence. Deportation, he wrote acidly, "assists in the process of making Britain great again".

Most powerfully, Gilroy treated Britain's Caribbean settlers not as a problem to be solved, but as people whose culture offered sophisticated readings of the world. He saw the [soundsystem culture](#) of reggae and dub – whose body-shaking bass frequencies could be heard, and felt, in parties across London – as harbouring a radical critique of the modern world. Darkened dance halls transported revellers out of the oppressive present, while the music's lyrics punctured the drudgery of labouring under capitalism.

Caribbean culture was also re-colouring Englishness itself. Gilroy analysed the 1984 single Cockney Translation by the London-born reggae artist [Smiley Culture](#), which playfully juxtaposes cockney rhyming slang and black patois. "The implicit joke beneath the surface of the record," he wrote, "was that though many of London's working-class blacks were cockney by birth and experience ... their 'race' denied them access to [that] social category." He saw the song as a sign of his generation's emergent, hybrid Britishness.

Music is [central](#) to Gilroy's work, providing a kind of sonic argument against narrow nationalism. In his view, the history of black music is a powerful demonstration of how cultures, races, identities are all mongrel things, which can't be neatly packaged into ethnic parcels. Even a genre as seemingly American as hip-hop isn't purely American, he has pointed out: it was fertilised in the Bronx by Caribbean sound systems.

It was after a conversation with a musician, David Hinds, of the reggae band Steel Pulse, that Gilroy grew the dreadlocks that he keeps to this day. Interviewing him for a music zine during his Birmingham days, Gilroy spoke with Hinds late into the night, debating black power and music, and discussing Rastafarianism, a socio-political religion that connected people across the black Atlantic world. Growing out dreadlocks was a way of signifying one's ethical commitment to the "sufferers" of the world. In the Britain of the 70s and 80s, it was also a dangerous way to stand out.

When I asked him about this, more than four decades later, Gilroy resisted divulging what in particular prompted the decision to grow dreadlocks. I could tell that I was encroaching on personal territory. Instead, he answered by way of analogy. He talked about George Orwell, a figure whom he admires in all his contradictory complexity. In his essay [A Hanging](#), set in

Burma where he was a colonial officer, Orwell describes accompanying a colonial subject to the gallows. During this short journey, a dog runs up to the condemned and tries to lick his face. Moments like these humanise the prisoner, which horrifies Orwell, as it makes the injustice of what is happening inescapable.

In Burma, Orwell decided to tattoo his hands. “He did this to make sure he would never be comfortable in polite society,” Gilroy said. “He marked his body in a way that said to them: I am not one of you.”

An hour after sunrise, on a bright, cloudless day earlier this year, I met Gilroy on Hampstead Heath in north London for a walk. “There are so many migratory birds arriving at the moment it’s a joy,” he had written in an email a few days earlier. He was once again dressed in black, this time with a pair of binoculars around his neck and with dark-tinted, circular sunglasses. He lent me a pair of “bins”, as he called them, and we walked over the hills and through the ancient woodland. “If we’re really lucky,” he said. “We’ll see a kestrel.” (I had heard from his friends that Gilroy was a birdwatcher, but when I first put this to him, he flinched. “I don’t like ‘birdwatcher’ as an identity category,” he said. He stressed that he does not wear camouflage or go to bird fairs and that he’s “not part of that culture”.)

The green, sun-speckled heath was almost empty of people. The morning air was piped with birdsong. It was a pastoral scene, the kind that might be called typically English. As we walked, Gilroy identified varieties of bluebell and rhapsodised over ancient oak trees. He has an exacting ear, easily distinguishing different species of bird from their interlaced song. “A lot of these birds have migrated from west and central Africa,” Gilroy said. “What can I hear right now? I can hear a great tit, a blue tit, and there’s a particular kind of warbler – that sound – which comes up from the area between Niger and Senegal.” Later, to a bemused university colleague who happened to be walking by, he taxonomised three types of woodpecker.



Prof Paul Gilroy near his home in north London. Photograph: Eddie Otchere/The Guardian

The day before, Gilroy had delivered his inaugural lecture at UCL, where he has been a professor since 2019, via videolink. He used it to make sense of Boris Johnson's government and the [Sewell report](#), published in March by the government's centre for race and ethnic disparities. For Gilroy, the report – which [clumsily downplayed](#) the significance of racism in British life – signalled an attempt to wind back the political clock to a time when anger at racism could be dismissed as people being chippy. “It’s designed to be an insult to the likes of me,” he told me as we walked.

The culture wars have been simmering for as long as Gilroy has been alive. In the 80s, he wrote about how the press would claim Labour-run councils’ anti-racist endeavours were destroying freedom of speech. But much has changed, too; the Conservative cabinet, for instance, is more diverse than ever before. “Overtly racist messaging on immigration, culture and heritage,” he said in the lecture, “while sock-puppeting the diversity and inclusion of minority government affiliates has, so far at least, proved to be a way to hold a new electoral bloc together and maintain the high temperature of populist and authoritarian ultra-nationalism.”

But Gilroy believes there's something brittle about the Conservatives' approach, which seeks to launch American-inspired battles over cultural values. "I think that the British political class has been entirely bereft of any ideas of its own for a very long time," he told me. "And its dismal inability to imagine a future for this country that is not an American future is expressed in the turn towards denouncing '[critical race theory](#)' or going on about these things."

Race and racism have never been, for him, about individual attitudes. They rather constitute a terrain on which politics takes place, where social meaning is made. In *After Empire*, he describes race as something that "absorbs the cries of those who suffer by making them sound less human". The triumphant indifference of the UK government towards the suffering of others – it is in the process of making it even harder for refugees to claim asylum – is a sign that race continues to do its pernicious work.

The anti-racist mobilisations of 2020, the largest in British history, sparked by the murder of George Floyd in the US, took Gilroy aback. He remembers watching the toppling of the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston on a livestream. For many years, he had felt unsure about whether such statues should fall. He preferred to see them transformed, as in Hew Locke's 2006 artwork [Restoration](#), which imagined the statue of Colston smothered in layers of guilty gold, or the May Day protesters who once gave Churchill's statue in Parliament Square a [grass Mohican](#) and lick of red paint. Gilroy is not an instinctive iconoclast: as a child, he told me, he queued with his parents outside Westminster Hall to see Churchill's body lying in state. He believes that politeness and civility are undervalued virtues.

But his doubts were swept away by Bristol's colourful crowd. "I couldn't believe it," he told me. When we spoke in December, he still seemed euphoric at the memory. Seeing Colston sink into the water had felt like a "beautiful symbolic eruption", a glimpse of what England could be. As the months went by, some of that optimism waned. "We witnessed something special and incredible last summer," he told me on Hampstead Heath in spring. "But I'm not seeing a lot of continued momentum. Maybe I'm not looking in the right places." Gilroy is at his gloomiest when thinking about

the effect that “timeline media” like Twitter and Facebook is having on young activists, drawing them into circular and parochial arguments online.



The statue of Edward Colston being pushed into the River Avon in Bristol in June 2020. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

Anti-racism has changed since Gilroy’s youth, its edge blunted. For much of the 20th century, being against racism meant being for a radically different political and economic settlement, such as socialism or communism. Today it can mean little more than doing what Gilroy mockingly calls “McKinsey multiculturalism”: keeping unjust societies as they are, except with a few “black and brown bodies” in the corporate boardrooms. (“I’m not very interested in decolonising the 1%”, he told me.) What is left is a more individualistic anti-racist culture, which is keen on checking privilege and affirming the validity of other people’s experiences, but has trouble creating durable institutions or political programmes.

There are moments when Gilroy shifts into lyrical lament, but he usually catches himself and tries to correct course. He has described himself as a “[cosmic pessimist](#)” moved by the “obligation to find hope”. During one conversation, when I asked whether figures like Priti Patel, the UK government’s hard-right home secretary, whose parents were Indian migrants from east Africa, represent the end of a unifying anti-racism,

Gilroy demurred. “For every Priti Patel, for every ‘Dishy Rishi’, there are people out there doing things that are important work in solidarity with one another,” he said.

He talked about the [annual march](#) to Downing Street that memorialises the hundreds of people who’ve lost their lives to police violence. You can see “all kinds of faces” on those walks, he said. (He tries to attend each year.) Then he described the aftermath of the Grenfell fire in 2017, when people of all religions responded with food, support, solidarity. The rhetoric that came from the survivors of the Grenfell fire stirred him. “It was strongly humanistic actually,” he said. Their banners, he explained, critiqued the murderous crime that they had suffered in the language of a common humanity.

A few years ago, on board a train headed for New Haven, Connecticut, Gilroy noticed something on the other side of the window: a bald eagle perched in a tree. He turned to his fellow commuters to see if they were also interested in what was, after all, their national emblem. They weren’t. “They just thought I was some crazy black person,” he recalled. By this point in career, in the early 2000s, Gilroy had left the UK for Yale, where he would become chair of the African American Studies department. He is proud of what he accomplished there, but there was some homesickness – and controversy.

One of the guiding principles of his work is a hostility towards “ethnic absolutism”, be it white supremacism or black nationalism, which, Gilroy has said, “can be as toxic as any other form of nationalism”. (He has pointed out that the black nationalist Marcus Garvey once boasted that his organisation was among the “first fascists”.) Above all, he is deeply sceptical about the very idea of race itself. He sometimes places the word “race” in scare quotes to remind his readers that racial categories like black and white do not refer to some essential truth that stretches back through time. Instead, they are a [modern invention](#), dating back to the ordering of the world by European imperialism. He likes to direct attention to the artificiality of these categories, the way they are made and remade. Indians during the 1857 rebellion against British rule were called “niggers” by officials; West Indian people, like Gilroy’s mother, only became “black”

when they arrived in England. (“How I hated that word ‘black’ and the emotions, concepts and associations it aroused,” Beryl Gilroy wrote in her memoir.) As her son once put it, “It’s white supremacy that made us black.”

This rejection of race doesn’t entail the denial of racism. Quite the opposite: race is a fiction with real effects – and Gilroy has spent much of his life pointing these out. But its constructed nature does mean that when we see a person’s racial identity, what we’re really seeing is a “virtual reality given meaning only by the fact that racism endures”, as he has written. Subjugated people might find solace and community in their race, but the long-term consequence of anti-racist work should be to discard the idea of “race” altogether.

Gilroy spent the 90s weaving these ideas into his third major book, Between Camps – or as it was more provocatively titled in the US, Against Race – which came out when he was at Yale. The book develops a complex argument about the lingering afterlife of fascism in capitalist democracies, which is connected to a provocative critique of identity politics. Race, he argued, was becoming antiquated – and this was a good thing. “Action against racial hierarchies,” he wrote, in what is perhaps his most quoted line, “can proceed more effectively when it has been purged of any lingering respect for the idea of ‘race’.” Between Camps was also deeply critical of a regressive “conservatism” in corporate black American culture, which trafficked in a commodified blackness. (Among his targets were Spike Lee’s decision to set up an advertising agency, and the nihilism of much contemporary hip-hop.)

Hazel Carby, who has been friends with Gilroy since their days at Birmingham, was head of Yale’s African American studies department at the time. As a reporter [wrote](#) in 2001, she was hoping that Gilroy’s arrival at Yale would help broaden “the field’s purview beyond the borders of single nations and single-minded conceptions of race”. It did, but he didn’t endear himself. “The audience bristled at this limey’s apostasies” is how the cultural critic Sukhdev Sandhu [described](#) one of Gilroy’s public appearances during this time. Some American critics found Gilroy’s arguments muddled, haughty or excessively broad. Others felt that he had overlooked the practical implications of rejecting race: would it mean the end of anti-discrimination laws, for instance? Prof Ruth Wilson Gilmore loved Between

Camps, but it didn't go over well with all her students. "I found that [some of them] found it really nerve-racking and distasteful to think that race as a category should go away," she told me. "And that there was something wrong with somebody who thought that way."

When I asked him about his experiences in the US, Gilroy was hesitant. It was clear he was wounded by the period. "I don't want to make this into an argument with black Americans because I've been immensely affected by that history and culture, and it's educated me in ways that I'm really grateful for," he said. Much of his work, particularly his early books, had resonated there too. Saidya Hartman, a celebrated professor at Columbia University, told me about the formative impact of *The Black Atlantic* on her work. "At that moment, in US scholarship, the emphasis was still on minimising the role of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the making of capitalism," she said. "So to have the Black Atlantic argue so powerfully for its constitutive role in the making of modernity was really important."

But Gilroy admitted to me that he struggled with what he called the "parochial" elements in African American studies. Eventually, he said, he experienced such "unpleasantness at the hands of some African American intellectuals who objected to my expressing my opinions about them as an outsider" that he returned to the UK. For some thinkers in the US, this irritation persists. In his 2017 book *Black and Blur*, the theorist Fred Moten wrote a lengthy and unsparing footnote that took Gilroy to task: "Who are you to lecture blacks in the United States, whom you conceive in the most egregiously undifferentiated way, about their international dissident responsibilities, while speaking of 'We Britons' ... ?"

But as the dust has settled, younger people have made use of *Between Camps*. It "anticipated so many of the problems and questions that we are grappling with now," says the US writer Asad Haider, who cited Gilroy's work in *Mistaken Identity*, his 2018 book about the limits of narrow identity politics. Haider gives a first-hand account of a student politics campaign that broke down because groups devolved into bickering, racialised sub-groups. The key idea he takes from Gilroy is that "we have to go beyond the identity-based conception of politics to one of universal emancipation". ("Bringing the word identity together with the word politics," Gilroy once

told me, “makes politics impossible, actually, for me, in any meaningful sense. Politics requires the abandonment of identity in a personal sense.”)

Gilroy doesn’t endorse a colour-blind politics that pretends the idea of race can be wished away. The post-racial world has to be fought for, against the odds. When Haider asked if Gilroy would provide a quote for his book, which he did, Gilroy sent him a favoured photograph of his, taken at the Manchester Pan-African Congress of 1945. The scene features placards with slogans like “Arabs and Jews united against British imperialism!” and “Labour with a white skin cannot emancipate itself while labour with a black skin is branded”.

In recent years, the appeal of an academic current known as Afropessimism has brought home just how untimely Gilroy’s ideas are. Its best-known proponent, Frank B Wilderson III, at the University of California, Irvine, contends that black people are viewed by all other people, including people of colour, consciously or not, as outside humanity. The result is that they are subject to a “gratuitous” violence that is unlike any other type of racism. To Wilderson, slavery is not a thing of the past – in fact, it has never really ended.

The rise of Afropessimism is a bleak sign for the likes of Gilroy, schooled on Stuart Hall’s argument that race is made politically meaningful through the struggle against capitalism, which is itself not eternal. Gilroy sees Afropessimism as part of an “ontological turn” – ontology is the study of being – in which race becomes an unassailable barrier between the self and the world, and anti-black violence an immutable fact. “What’s interesting to me is how resonant the Afropessimist outlook has proved to be,” Gilroy said. “I can’t help thinking that it’s got something to do with the fact that it absolves you of having to do anything at all. That really what you have to do is just be black. And there’s a sufficiency in that.”

In sharp contrast, Gilroy wants to reinvigorate an old ideal: humanism. In some scholarly circles, calling oneself a humanist can sound not just antiquated, but suspect. It was, after all, the name of the woolly ideology of equality propagated by Europeans at the height of empire, who spoke of the liberty of man while denying it to millions. But to Gilroy, there is hope in

the promise of a radical humanism, illuminating a post-racial world. This, he believes, is the humanism of figures who regularly appear in his work such as Du Bois, Primo Levi, Toni Morrison and the French-Martinican revolutionary Frantz Fanon. If thinkers who had lived through the 20th century's abominations could hold on to the idea of a humanism worthy of the name, then so can we.



Stuart Hall, writer, intellectual and co-supervisor of Gilroy's PhD.
Photograph: Eamonn McCabe/The Guardian

Gilroy's prose can be difficult. His style is meditative, incantatory. He does not so much pursue a thesis in a linear fashion as solder ideas together into striking shapes. Writers, political figures and musicians are plucked from history and the present, placed in conversation with one another; a chapter might begin with two epigraphs, one from Walter Benjamin and the other from Michael Jackson. Sometimes the effect is frustrating, sometimes revelatory. A single poetic sentence might illuminate paragraphs of slow, swirling argument.

In 2019, after winning the Holberg prize, Gilroy travelled to Norway to give [the laureate's lecture](#), which he titled Refusing Race and Salvaging the Human. It is perhaps the clearest and most succinct statement of his worldview to date. "If you want to be serious about the struggle against

racial orders,” he said, explaining his motivation behind the lecture, “you have to adapt your understanding of what it is to be a human being and why that is worth fighting over.”

The central scene is taken from the 1789 autobiography of [Olaudah Equiano](#), the former slave and abolitionist. Equiano describes how he took control of a floundering ship during a storm in which the white crew had “become inert, apparently indifferent to their own fate”. With a few others, Equiano rescued the vessel, working so hard that the skin was flayed from his hands. Equiano’s actions scrambled the ship’s racial hierarchy. He was temporarily recognised as a kind of “chieftain” by the crew.

Gilroy’s point is that disasters can create the conditions in which we are forced to look beyond race towards our common humanity. What does he hate so much about race? It’s not just that it is a bogus concept, not just that it leaves behind it an endless trail of atrocities, but that, on a smaller scale, it tries to limit what a person can be, telling them that they are one thing or the other, rather than many things at once.

In the lecture, he offered this summary of his politics, which might be best imagined daubed on the walls of a future flooded city: “It is imperative to remain less interested in who or what we imagine ourselves to be than in what we can do for one another, both in today’s emergency conditions and in the grimmer circumstances that surely await us.”

Gilroy is rarely at a loss for words. As we walked on Hampstead Heath, he discussed why he left Yale in 2005. It was partly to do with the way his ideas were received, but there was something else. He came to a stop by a wooden fence. As he paused, the birdsong seemed to grow louder.

“I have a weird love of England. And London in particular,” he eventually said. “This is my home. *God*, it is. And I didn’t know it was until I went somewhere else.”

When I asked why this love was weird, he replied: “Because it’s ambivalent. And because it doesn’t love me back. It’s unrequited.”

He did, surprisingly, receive an invitation from Theresa May's office in 2017 to be put forward for a CBE for "services to cultural and literary studies". Gilroy wasn't bothered so much about the imperial connotation of becoming a Commander of the British empire, as that was clearly "absurd", but did find himself getting cross that the invitation came with a form about his ethnicity to fill in. "So the woman who is hounding my brothers and sisters to death over [the Windrush scandal](#)," he told me in an email, "[wanted] to monitor my ethnicity while handing me a bauble. How fucked up was that?" He declined the invitation.



Finsbury Park in north London. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

In 2004's *After Empire*, which he wrote while in the US, Gilroy puzzled over his homeland from afar. Why did it seem to be so stuck, unable to yield a different conception of what it might be? The obsession with the second world war – from the English anti-German football chant "Two World Wars, One World Cup" to the endless, commemorative flyovers of spitfires – troubled him. It seemed like a symptom of a society trapped in a [warped image of the past](#): where the arrival of immigrants or refugees were spoken of as an act of invasion, where memories of the anti-Nazi war were stirred to justify interventions in the Middle East. He noticed that the "neurotic" fixation on the war went hand in hand with a carefully curated ignorance about [empire and decolonisation](#) – the brutal conflicts in Malaya, Ireland,

Kenya and elsewhere. This stifling airlessness, this “postcolonial melancholia”, could also express itself through “outbursts of manic euphoria”, as Gilroy recently reminded his followers [on Twitter](#) in the hysterical run-up to England’s appearance in the Euro 2020 final.

But the book also offered a measure of hope. Gilroy saw stirrings of something positive in the hybrid styles and self-effacing humour of British pop culture – the Streets and Ali G are cited – but also in life as it was lived. Take the north London neighbourhood he has called home for almost 40 years, Finsbury Park. In the mind of England’s rightwing newspapers, it is a byword for social breakdown: a den of Islamism, haunted by the threat of inter-ethnic tension. The cleric Abu Hamza, currently serving life sentence in the US on terror charges, was once the imam of the local mosque. In 2017, it was attacked by a white supremacist.

In Gilroy’s view, to focus on this is to mistake the exception for the rule. He sees Finsbury Park as a “glorious expression” of actually existing multiculturalism, where racial differences are rendered banal by the flow of urban life. People in cities like London more or less get on, living side by side, with young people, in particular, developing cultures that mix styles, music and slang – the opposite of ethnic absolutism. Gilroy has elevated this observation into a theory, “conviviality”.

Affirming the creole pleasures of urban life isn’t enough, of course. The years after Gilroy wrote *After Empire* have seen the great recession, austerity, intensified gentrification, the fire at Grenfell Tower, and the pandemic, which has produced suffering for ethnic minorities at disproportionate rates. Convivial life is being tested. But it promises something more substantive, and hopeful, than mindless flag-waving.

He has always described himself as English, rather than British, he told me on Hampstead Heath. He loves England’s countryside, its folk music, its language. “I think I was worried with the idea of Britishness that it would only end up being the black and minority ethnic populations who took it seriously. Because it has no cultural content.” At that moment, a little greenfinch made itself heard. “They’re the ones I like the most to look at,” he said. “They’ve got very forked tails and they’re green. There’s something

about the greenness of the [greenfinch](#), and the way it complements the leaves ...”

“I hope I don’t sound patriotic,” he said, moments after talking about his claim on Englishness. “Patriotism is a betrayal of that attachment. Because it reduces it to some sort of formula.”

Gilroy is fond of the words of the Trinidadian historian CLR James, who wrote, in a 1969 essay, that “black studies” is the “history of western civilization. I can’t see it otherwise.” This might be the mission statement for what he imagines will be his final job: directing the newly formed [Sarah Parker Remond Centre](#) for the study of racism and racialisation at UCL. James’s point was that studying race shouldn’t be a parochial activity, but a way of understanding the world as it is for everyone. And as it might be. For Gilroy, this universalism is the whole point: the anti-racist struggle against police violence, he has emphasised in the past, should improve society for *everyone*, forcing the reform of “legal procedures that can impact on the lives of all citizens”.

[Why every single statue should come down | Gary Younge](#)
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At the end of *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy wrote that the “colour line”, as WEB Du Bois termed the racial divisions etched across the globe, would soon no longer be the central axis of political conflict. It is still there, he told me, but the task is to see how it crisscrosses with other axes: health, wealth, gender, climate, technology. He wants his students to address race in a “planetary way”. At the UCL Centre, they will consider artificial intelligence, public health, borders: the architecture of 21st-century life.

But the past lurks in the shadows. Late last year, during his regular early-morning walks in Finsbury Park, Gilroy noticed something that echoed the racist graffiti he couldn’t escape as a child. Far-right vandals had been etching Celtic Crosses, a white supremacist symbol, into logs and tree stumps in the park during the night. “It’s the old circle with the cross through it,” he said. “A lot of neo-Nazi groups use the sign.” There’s an app through which you can report vandalism to the council, but he couldn’t be

bothered to go through all that. “I’ve been rolling over the logs so it doesn’t show,” he said, “in the hope that no one will roll them back the other way.”

This article was amended on 6 August 2021. The Holberg prize is not awarded by the Norwegian government, but is funded by it. This has been corrected.

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

**Love, courage and solidarity: 20
essential lessons young athletes taught
us this summer**



Every one a winner! (*From left*) Simone Biles, Tom Daley, Harry Kane, Naomi Osaka, Marcus Rashford and Sky Brown. Composite: Getty/Rex

Every one a winner! (*From left*) Simone Biles, Tom Daley, Harry Kane, Naomi Osaka, Marcus Rashford and Sky Brown. Composite: Getty/Rex

Marcus Rashford, Naomi Osaka, Simone Biles and Tom Daley – from the Euros to Wimbledon to the Olympics, this season's biggest stars have shown success is about much more than trophies



Sirin Kale

Thu 5 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

The Olympics are racing towards the finishing line; the Euros gave us euphoria and heartbreak; and Wimbledon revealed that the true hero on Centre Court was not an Adonis in crisp tennis whites, but rather [a middle-aged vaccine researcher](#). More than anything, though, this summer has thrown a spotlight on the inspiring and surprising strength and character of young people like never before.

We have watched elite athletes behave with the sort of dignity and respect that world leaders would do well to emulate. They have competed under intense global scrutiny at the highest levels and never lost sight of the fact that how you behave matters more than the goals you score or the aces you serve. Here are 20 things we learned about youth politics and culture from an astonishing summer of sport.

Naomi Osaka put mental health before trophies



Naomi Osaka during her first-round match at the French Open, after which she withdrew. Photograph: Christophe Ena/AP

When the 23-year-old [pulled out of the French Open](#), then Wimbledon, to focus on her mental health, Osaka showed the world that elite athletes are people; that we cannot use them like arcade machines. In her Roland Garros withdrawal statement, she wrote that she experienced “huge waves of anxiety” before interviews and had endured “long bouts of depression”. Her bravery prompted a groundswell of support from tennis legends, including Martina Navratilova and Billie Jean King. Osaka destigmatised mental health concerns for a generation of athletes. For that, she should be commended.

The England team ended the culture wars (for a few weeks)

Once a fortnight, the UK collectively loses its mind over flags/children’s books/statues. It is an endless cycle of outrage in which the only winners are chattering pundits and merchants of hate.

When Gareth Southgate announced [that England would take the knee before Euro 2020 games](#), bad-faith provocateurs accused the team of [cultural Marxism](#) – because multimillionaire footballers are always on the brink of

trying to overthrow capitalism. Southgate, with characteristic decency, backed his players, explaining that they had “a responsibility to the wider community” to use their voices on “matters such as equality, inclusivity and racial injustice”.



Raheem Sterling and Luke Shaw take the knee before England v Germany at Euro 2020. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

With this, Southgate and his team helped to define a patriotism that is not boorish or rooted in rose-tinted nostalgia, but rather focused on trying your best for your country and giving back to your community.

This young, diverse team did not shy away from passionately defending these principles. When Priti Patel condemned the racist abuse of Bukayo Saka, Marcus Rashford and Jadon Sancho after they missed penalties in the final, their teammate [Tyrone Mings accused the home secretary of “stoking the fire”](#) by refusing to condemn those who had booed players taking the knee. His comments prompted much soul-searching among Conservative MPs, with Johnny Mercer and [Steve Baker](#) suggesting that the Tories needed to rethink their attitude to the gesture.

A squad of footballers – two of them teenagers – ended the culture wars (albeit temporarily). For that, we should be grateful.

The Danes protected the dignity of their teammate



Denmark players protect Christian Eriksen as he receives live-saving treatment during their Euros match against Finland. Photograph: Stuart Franklin/Getty Images

[Christian Eriksen's cardiac arrest](#) during Denmark's game against Finland was horrifying to witness: the hush descending on the stadium as fans realised the gravity of the situation; the sight of his panicked partner. But the way Eriksen's teammates formed a human shield around their fallen friend, preserving his privacy while medics worked successfully to resuscitate him, was a spontaneous and heartfelt gesture of dignity – even as the cameras refused to cut away.

Mason Mount made a little girl's dream come true

A glow settled over England when Mason Mount spotted a young girl in the crowd after England's semi-final win over Denmark, climbed into the stands and [handed her his shirt](#). She collapsed in ecstatic squeals while the spectators around her cheered. Properly heartwarming.

Kye Whyte had Bethany Shriever's back



Kye Whyte lifts Bethany Shriever after their Olympic successes.
Photograph: Alex Whitehead/swpix.com/Rex/Shutterstock

With UK Sport no longer funding female BMXers, Bethany Shriever had to crowdfund even to qualify for Tokyo 2020. Nonetheless, she stormed her way to Team GB's first ever gold medal in BMX racing. Her friend and fellow Team GB BMXer Kye Whyte, who won the UK's first ever silver medal, was cheering her all the way. After Shriever crossed the finishing line, she collapsed with agonising leg cramps – [so Whyte scooped her up and held her aloft](#), as triumphantly as she deserved. Did you have something in your eye? Me too.

England’s footballers reminded us that the game is for everyone

From Harry Kane’s rainbow armband – showing solidarity with LGBTQ+ people – to [Jordan Henderson’s tweet supporting a non-binary, queer fan](#) who attended an England game in makeup, the conduct of the Three Lions this summer showed that football is for everyone – not just the beer-guzzlers and [bum-flarers](#).

The high jumpers shared gold – and history



Golden boys Mutaz Essa Barshim and Gianmarco Tamberi. Photograph: Francisco Seco/AP

The Olympics is not just about medals, but also, as the Games' charter puts it, "friendship, solidarity and fair play". [Qatar's Mutaz Essa Barshim and Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi embodied this spirit](#) after tying in an exhausting two-hour high jump final. They were offered the opportunity to have a jump-off. Instead, Barshim asked an official if they could have two golds. If you agree to share, came the response. "History, my friend," said Barshim, shaking Tamberi's hand. [It was a joyous example of sportsmanship at its best.](#)

Kalvin Phillips rushed to console Bukayo Saka

Penalties are organised cruelty at the best of times, but during an international final they can feel positively medieval. After Saka missed the tournament-deciding penalty in the Euros final, the Italian team flooded past in glee. Saka was distraught, choking back tears. All alone, he looked like the teenager he was. Then Kalvin Phillips – a man who had just run for two hours straight – bolted towards his teammate and pulled him into a tight hug. It was a moment that cut through, because it showed that supporting your teammates in triumph and adversity is more important than any goal. In that embrace, Phillips reminded us that the best athletes have heart.

The Irish Olympic team showed their class

The Irish consistently show up the British – in drinking ability, accents and devotion to the craic. At Tokyo 2020, they added manners, stopping to bow to their Japanese hosts as a [token of respect](#) during the opening ceremony. It was a gracious, Olympic-spirited move.

Marcus Rashford was ... Marcus Rashford



Marcus Rashford, AKA the leader of the opposition. Photograph: Patrick Elmont/UEFA/Getty Images

Marcus Rashford is not only a national hero but a national leader. At just 23, he has forced the government into [two U-turns on free school meals](#), launched a [nationwide reading initiative](#) – and somehow found time to play for England and Manchester United.

What makes Rashford so remarkable is how he uses his experiences of growing up in a low-income household to destigmatise and advocate for such children today. He represents the very best of this new generation of principled athletes: never self-aggrandising, always quietly determined to use his platform for good.

Tom Daley wept beautiful tears of joy ...

Those two fat teardrops on Tom Daley's cheeks after he and Matty Lee [took gold in the men's synchronised 10-metres](#) represented the culmination of a lifetime's work. Hours training in the pool beside his beloved father. The bullying at school. The struggle of coming out. The heartbreak of his father's death before Daley won his first Olympic medal. His disappointing finish at the 2011 world championship. Crashing out of the 10-metre semi-finals in Rio in 2016. And then coming back from it all, to win the gold he had coveted his entire career. They spoke volumes.

... and showed us the true meaning of Pride ...

Daley has redefined what it means to be a man in sport, speaking about his sexuality with openness and sincerity. After taking gold, he spoke movingly about this. "When I was younger, I always felt like the one who was alone and different and didn't fit ... I hope that any young LGBT person out there can see, no matter how alone you feel right now, you are not alone," he said. "You can achieve anything." Thanks to trailblazers such as Daley, this has been [a "rainbow Olympics"](#), with at least 172 LGBTQ+ athletes competing in Tokyo, more than three times as many as in Rio. Afterwards, he said he wanted to embrace his son and husband – and suddenly his tears were catching.

... and became a knitting icon



Tom Daley gets crafty at Tokyo 2020. Photograph: Clive Rose/Getty Images

Not content with being an LGBTQ+ Olympic champion with the torso of a mountain range, Daley also knits. At the women's springboard finals, he was serenely creating what looked like a purple scarf. At another event, it was a Team GB cardigan. On social media, Daley has shown off: a [pouch for his gold medal](#), a [cat couch](#), a [doggie jumper](#) and, best of all, a [tiny Bernie Sanders](#). Daley's knitting reminds us why he is a hero of British sport – because he is utterly unafraid to be himself.

Simone Biles showed that mental and physical health are the same thing ...

Simone Biles, widely acknowledged as the greatest female gymnast ever, arrived at Tokyo 2020 with the weight of the world on her shoulders. Commentators were predicting a clean sweep for the first woman to land a [Yurchenko double pike](#). (I could try to describe it, but it wouldn't do it justice. Just imagine the rules of gravity have been suspended.)

But things began to go wrong in qualifying. They fell apart when she stepped out of bounds during her floor routine, then aborted her vault in mid-air during the women's team finals, narrowly avoiding serious injury and scoring one of the lowest marks of her career. Biles subsequently pulled

out of the women's all-around and the women's team event, explaining that she had lost her air-awareness – a phenomenon known as the “twisties” – and was struggling with her mental health.



Simone Biles performs in the balance beam final at Toyko 2020.
Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

She later said it “sucked” not to be able to compete when she had spent the past half-decade preparing. But she explained that she had been inspired to talk about her mental health by watching Osaka and that she had quit [to protect her “mind and body”](#).

Some armchair experts would have preferred Biles to risk her neck for their viewing pleasure. But, overwhelmingly, the reaction was compassionate and supportive. Biles showed us that mental and physical health are connected – and that there is no shame in quitting to prioritise your wellbeing. For this, not for her Yurchenko double pike, [Biles will always be the Goat](#).

... and what it means to be resilient

Even as she struggled, Biles showed up to support her US gymnastics teammates, whooping and shouting from the sidelines. “I’m proud of how the girls stepped up,” Biles told reporters. It was no less than we now expect

of Biles, who has overcome incredible personal adversity (she was in foster care before being adopted by her grandparents) and trauma (she is a survivor of sexual abuse by the US team's former doctor [Larry Nassar](#)) to become one of the greatest athletes of her generation. After a week of nonstop speculation about whether she would pull out of the Games entirely, [she took bronze on the balance beam](#). That single medal showed her deep resilience more than her embarrassment of golds.

Ruby Tui announced herself



New Zealand's Ruby Tui. Photograph: Dan Mullan/Getty Images

The New Zealand rugby player is a charisma atom bomb. So under the radar that she doesn't have a Wikipedia page, Tui became a viral sensation after being pulled aside for a post-match interview after a stunning 36-0 defeat of Russia. After thanking her village, her family and God in Samoan, Tui grinned her way through [the most charming, feel-great interview](#) of the Games, congratulating her opponents on a well-fought fight, describing the Russians as "really cool people, man", and revealing that her team had donated to the British team's fundraising efforts. Tui represents pure Olympic vibes: respecting your opponent, loving the sport and having a laugh.

Norwegian women take zero sexist nonsense

It is 2021, but still we expect female athletes to dress to titillate audiences. After campaigning to no avail for an astonishing 15 years to be allowed to wear shorts, the Norwegian women's beach handball team decided: enough. They went thigh-length, like their male peers, at the European championship in July to protest against the sexist dress code – and were fined €1,500 (£1,295). But the world – and the pop star Pink – was with them. [She offered to pay their fine](#) – and the officials of the sport's governing body looked like regressive dinosaurs.

England's footballers showed what it means to be accountable

We live in the age of the political non-apology – which is why the astonishing statements put out by [Saka](#), [Sancho](#) and [Rashford](#) after their missed penalties during the Euro 2021 final were stunning to behold. “I would like to say sorry to all my teammates, coaching staff and most of all the fans who I let down,” Sancho wrote. Here were three young men apologising fully (even though they didn't need to), taking accountability and promising to work harder – all after coping with vile racist trolling online.

Charlotte Worthington showed us what bravery looks like

Charlotte Worthington had to work 40-hour weeks in a Mexican restaurant to support her biking career, competing during annual leave. Fast-forward to Tokyo 2020 and she tried a groundbreaking 360-degree backflip – but came off her bike. If she had completed it, she would have been the first woman to do it in an international competition. But Worthington took the risk, tried again – and nailed it. For these unbelievable levels of bravery and self-belief, she took gold.

Sky Brown became Britain's youngest Olympic medallist



Sky Brown competing at Tokyo 2020. Photograph: Ian MacNicol/Getty Images

A tiny, gravity-defiant, flying figure: at 13 years old, Britain's youngest-ever Olympian took bronze in the women's skateboarding. Tony Hawk has called her "one of the best well-rounded skaters ever". Sky Brown has the maturity of a competitor thrice her age – and the fearlessness of a babe of two. (Tellingly, she is also good friends with her young rivals, including fellow Olympians Sakura Yosozumi, Letícia Bufoni and Rayssa Leal. "We motivate each other to go hard," [Brown told the Guardian in July](#).) Refreshingly, there are no pushy parents or brutalising coaches in the background. Instead, Brown exemplifies the spirit of a new cohort of gen Z athletes: wildly talented and competing for the joy of the sport.

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Interview

‘The best summer of my life’ – Kae Tempest takes Sophocles on a gender odyssey

[Kate Wyver](#)



‘I took a step back and thought: Hang on a minute’ ... Tempest, whose play Paradise is being staged by the National theatre. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

‘I took a step back and thought: Hang on a minute’ ... Tempest, whose play Paradise is being staged by the National theatre. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

The writer has turned a Greek tragedy about a marooned soldier into an all-women play for the Covid era. They reveal how its creation mirrored their own journey



Thu 5 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

“These stories can be intimidating for so many reasons,” [Kae Tempest](#) says of the classical Greek tragedies. “But more than that, they are galvanising. They give you something that was important thousands of years ago that lands you more fully in the now. They have this roaring effect, where we’ve brought the past with us.”

[Tempest, who uses they/them pronouns](#), is a revelatory writer and performer, seamlessly blending the ancient and the new. Much of their work is steeped in the history and magic of Greek myths, from the Ted Hughes award-winning [Brand New Ancients](#), which places the gods alongside us modern mortals, to the hypnotic, flesh-filled poetry collection [Hold Your Own](#), based on the story of gender-switching prophet Tiresias.

Now *Paradise*, the Mercury-nominated writer’s adaptation of the Sophocles tragedy *Philoctetes*, is about to open at the Olivier, the largest stage at the [National Theatre](#) in London. We speak on the last day of rehearsals, Tempest sitting in the Olivier foyer with director Ian Rickson and actor Lesley Sharp, all exhausted, exhilarated and relieved to have made it this far.



‘The role is extraordinary – and usually a man gets to do it’ ... Lesley Sharp as Philoctetes in rehearsals. Photograph: Helen Murray

First performed in 409BC, Sophocles’ drama, one of his lesser-performed plays, focuses on three soldiers. Philoctetes – the only soldier brave enough to step forward and light Heracles’s funeral pyre, winning the hero’s bow as a reward – has spent 10 years on an island, abandoned by Odysseus on the way to Troy. When Odysseus needs Philoctetes again in order to fight, he returns to the island with young soldier Neoptolemus, and attempts to trick the older man into leaving the island with them. The original involves godly intervention, acceptance of fate, and an overriding devotion to triumph and battle-fuelled glory.

Following largely the same structure, but questioning the morals, meanings and ending of Sophocles’ original, Tempest sets this adaptation in a non-time, where weapons from the gods sit alongside references to flatscreen TVs. “When you do these plays,” Rickson says, “they allow you to unpack what heroism is. Concepts that Sophocles was fascinated by – dignity, honour, exile, trust – are as important now as 3,000 years ago. It’s the stuff of life.”

It was Rickson who introduced Tempest to the story of Philoctetes. A mentor to the writer for several years, he invited them to a reading

performed by ex-servicemen. “There was a resonance to their reading,” Tempest says. “It was like watching a conversation between soldiers 3,000 years apart.” Rickson – who directed [Jez Butterworth’s Jerusalem](#), which returns to the West End in 2022 – adds: “When you give an old play to a writer, you never know what it will do to them. But you want them to take it and run. Reading Kae’s poetry, and being a superfan of Brand New Ancients, I felt a synergy with what Sophocles was doing. I really felt he would enjoy Kae taking it on.”



‘There is life that is usually ignored in these grand old stories’ ... Paradise actors rehearse. Photograph: Helen Murray

Our lonely, wounded hero Philoctetes is played by Sharp, best known for [police drama Scott & Bailey](#), the National’s A Taste of Honey, and perhaps the scariest episode of Doctor Who ever, Midnight. Sharp did not wait for the part to be offered to her. “You either say: ‘Well, I’ll keep my fingers crossed and hope it might come my way’ – or you declare your love and interest. I’ve always sat back and kept my fingers crossed.” But after an early workshop for Paradise, in which she felt something “elemental”, she made her wishes clear. “I just felt something had happened,” she says. “I was a better actor for having engaged in that work. I sent Ian an email: ‘If this ever gets to a place where it’s going to be put on and you decide to cast the men as women, please could I throw my hat in the ring?’”

The role – which she describes as a “damaged, defiant, old, smelly, naughty, lost, lost, lost soul” – was hers. “It feels like one of those moments that don’t come along very often in an artistic life,” Sharp says. “The role is extraordinary. And usually, a man gets to do it.”

Tempest adds: “As a writer, you get so much wrong. At first, there were men playing men. They were incredible, the guys that came to read these parts. But I took a step back and just thought, ‘Hang on a minute, I’ve gone against my own belief systems. I’ve just made a play where the men are doing the acting and the women are just sitting around.’” When Sharp read as Philoctetes, Tempest says, the performance of masculinity, embedded in the text, became clearer – and the role came alive. The cast is now entirely made up of women, with Odysseus played by Anastasia Hille and Neoptolemus by Gloria Obianyo.



‘Every character is on a hero’s quest’ ... a 2009 production of the original in Paris. Photograph: Miguel Medina/AFP/Getty Images

These questions of casting took place in parallel with something larger. “My own journey of my own gender was happening,” Tempest says. [In August 2020, they announced that they were non-binary](#), changing their name. At the same time, they were “trying to grapple with what [the play] was trying to say about gender, which is often the way”. In [The Bricks That Built the](#)

Houses, their 2016 novel navigating harsh corners of London life, one of the protagonists, Harry, was originally written as male. “It took me two drafts before I got up the guts to say: ‘No, this character’s female, or presents as female.’ Quite often in my work, the first draft is what I’m not yet brave enough to negate.”

For Paradise, Tempest always knew the members of the chorus were going to be female, as opposed to Sophocles’ male sailors. “There is life that is usually ignored in these grand old stories,” they say, “that had to be persisting, surviving, not just on the peripheries of the drama, but central to it.”

The things I’m learning about what actors are capable of doing – it’s just blowing my mind

In their first non-fiction book, *On Connection*, published during the pandemic, Tempest writes: “Empathy is remembering that everybody has a story.” Paradise’s chorus is a testament to that. The women speak in verse, the words weaving between them as the soldiers argue. Cynical and watchful, curious and cruel, they defy cliche and fate. They have agency. “Each of those characters,” Tempest says, “has as much of a hero’s quest as Phil.”

Tempest has been loving rehearsals. “The feeling in the room is like nothing I’ve ever experienced,” they say. “It’s the best summer of my life. The things I’m learning about what actors are capable of doing, and how they approach text, it’s just blowing my mind.”



‘I really felt Sophocles would enjoy it’ ... Ian Rickson, Tempest and Sharp.
Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

The foyer we are talking in is almost empty, the night before it is due to fill up with the first non-socially-distanced audiences. Like most shows this year and in 2020, Paradise was hit with delays owing to Covid. Opening night should have been last summer. Their collective feeling is one of relief and gratitude to be back, to be working, to be here.

“I felt very moved by seeing all of the staff who’ve kept it ticking over while it’s been asleep,” Sharp says, looking around. “I feel like [the building] is very glad to have life coming back into it,” Rickson agrees. “The delays were upsetting,” he says, “but they allowed the work to mature, because it’s a mountain to climb. You have to step back, look at it and say: ‘OK, that’s a good route. Let’s go down again and think about it.’”

[Kate Tempest announces they are non-binary, changes name to Kae](#)
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The pandemic has influenced the text, admits Tempest. “I didn’t go back to the draft and say, ‘I’d better make it about Covid.’ But I trust that the guts of the text will be full with what we’re all going through. In a really obvious way, it’s about a soldier isolated in a cave who is given this opportunity to

leave his isolation. So, of course, that has all the resonances of what we've all been through. There's a lot about survival, wounds, recovery, victimhood, vengeance – and before Covid those words had different resonances.

"But the beautiful thing about performed language is that it can reverberate with whatever's happening in the moment. The text holds it." The writer pauses, then adds: "It's heavy magic when you get in a room and speak these old stories."

- Paradise is at the [National Theatre, London, until 11 September](#).
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Interview

‘I’ve been poor for a long time’: after many rejections, Karen Jennings is up for the Booker

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



Karen Jennings: ‘I finished the novel in 2017 and no one was interested.’
Photograph: Carol Coelho.

Karen Jennings: ‘I finished the novel in 2017 and no one was interested.’
Photograph: Carol Coelho.

The South African author struggled to find a publisher for her Booker-nominated novel *An Island*, which only had a print-run of 500 copies. She talks about rejection, her country and believing in herself

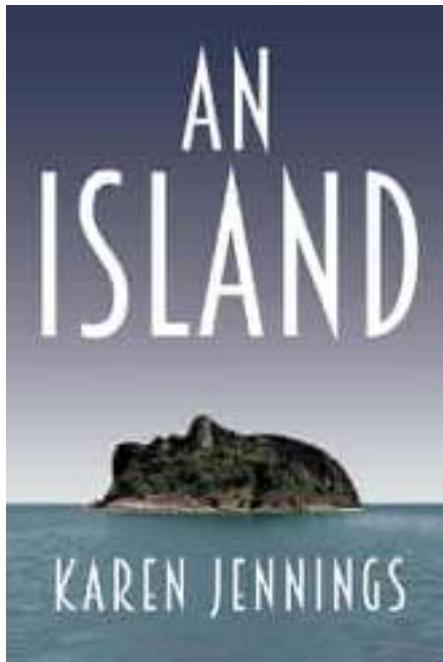


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Thu 5 Aug 2021 04.00 EDT

Karen Jennings is still in shock. It has been a few days since the announcement that her novel, *An Island*, has been [longlisted for the Booker prize](#), and the 38-year-old South African author looks as though she's reeling. Considering the novel's difficult route to publication, you can understand why. She doesn't even have an agent.

"It was incredibly difficult to find a publisher," she says, via video chat from Brazil, where she has spent the pandemic alongside her Brazilian husband, a scientist. Due to being essentially stranded there, she has yet to hold an actual physical copy of the book in her hands. "I finished the novel in 2017. And no one was interested. When I did finally get a small publisher in the UK and a small publisher in South Africa to co-publish, they couldn't get anyone to review the book. We couldn't get people to write endorsement quotes, or blurbs."



After many rejections, *An Island* – the story of a solitary lighthouse keeper’s encounter with a refugee who washes up on the shore of his island – was published by tiny indie press Holland House in a print run of a mere 500 copies owing to the pandemic. It was met mostly with silence.

“I felt very ashamed of myself,” she says, with refreshing honesty. “Because my publishers had put a lot of faith and time and, obviously, money into it. And it’s not that I personally was expecting fame or fortune or anything, but I felt that I had disappointed them. So it’s quite an extraordinary moment now to suddenly have all of this attention and I’m not quite sure how to handle it.

“The most disheartening thing for me has been that there’s been no interest in my writing, or in publishing me, in South Africa,” she continues. Though in the novel the lighthouse keeper’s nationality is not stated, nor the dictatorship he rebels against identified, the novel’s concerns – colonialism, racism, xenophobia, trauma, poverty and resistance – are clearly rooted in that country’s history. “It’s certainly not that I think that I’m an amazing writer and deserve all sorts of recognition,” she hastens to add.

Even her previous small publisher didn’t want *An Island*. I ask her why she thinks it was rejected so many times. A bunch of reasons were given – too

short, too experimental, too African, not African enough – but ultimately it came down to economics. “The only real response that I have been able to pin down was that it would not make any money,” she says, noting that however much an editor might love a book, these decisions are often made by the finance department. “Because I’m a literary writer, because I’m not famous, it’s too risky. Because no one buys or reads literary fiction. Also, I don’t write uplifting stories. And so it’s not the kind of thing that people want to take on holiday with them.”

I’ve been poor for a long time. I don’t have a car. I don’t have a house. I don’t have a career the way other people have

It is literary, but it’s not exactly inaccessible. There’s nothing florid or complex about Jennings’s spare prose, and the story has an allegorical feel to it that gives it universality. “It’s a short novel – I do prefer to write short novels, and I do prefer simple writing, no big fancy words or showing off … As much as I really work very hard at the writing, I would like it to appear effortless. So that when someone reads it, they can really get swept up with it.”

Jennings doesn’t read much contemporary fiction, and cites classic social realists such as Émile Zola and Charles Dickens, as well as John Steinbeck, as her literary influences. She was born in Cape Town and is the daughter of two teachers, an Afrikaans mother and an English father; her relationship with her dad, who died of lung cancer, is the subject of her memoir *Travels With My Father*. She wrote from a very young age, especially poetry, but she says she was very lazy about it. “I did a master’s degree in creative writing. And that’s when I started becoming quite disciplined, because I realised that in order to be a writer, one actually does have to write. You can’t just sit back and wait for inspiration or opportunity.”

Pursuing a writing life has come at a cost. “I’ve been really poor for a very long time,” she says, without a trace of self-pity. “I don’t have much of a social life either. You know, I don’t have fancy clothes. I don’t have a car. I don’t have a house. I don’t have a career the way other people have.”

She was only able to write *An Island* thanks to the Miles Morland Foundation writing scholarship, which supports African writing and literature. The vision of an old man defending his island came to her in a dream. “At the time in the news, there was a lot about the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe and the incredible xenophobia, but there were terrible cases of African refugees drowning, hundreds of them in boats that could barely stay afloat.” Jennings was interested in writing the story “from the point of view of the person that doesn’t want someone entering their land, and wants to keep the land for themselves”.

“I want to be very clear about this, that I don’t believe in reducing Africa to a single country. But in this case, I wanted to use an allegorical means to examine a very complex issue. To take what has been done to Africa in various forms over the centuries, and examine that in a very simple way with just these two protagonists.”

The result is a heartrending psychological portrait of trauma and xenophobia, and the scars left by successive corrupt governments on the people forced to endure them. “[The novel] was just an attempt by me to understand what it is that leads to violence, what leads to this feeling of wanting to keep outsiders away? South Africa has a very strong history of violence and of anger.”

Jennings works part time for an NGO that is trying to give a voice to people who live in informal settlements without access to water or sanitation. “Millions of people are living in these terrible conditions and they’re fed up. The government has been promising them things for 27 years now. Things have not improved for them. So they’re angry.”

She hopes that the Booker nomination will help draw attention to some of these issues, and to writers in South Africa who are grappling with them: “I want, as far as possible, this little bit of success that I’m having to benefit South Africa and Africa as much as it can.” It is still, she feels, largely ignored by the rest of the world, and she believes this is also a problem within the country itself. “Too often we are waiting to hear what the rest of the world thinks before we decide for ourselves if our own writers are good enough,” she says.

I'm trying to understand South Africa, understand Africa, understand what my place in it is

“There’s a big problem with the way that the rest of the world sees Africa. I think they want certain stories from Africa, and also they are tired of those stories. So it’s a difficult dance. Obviously, there’s more than just one type of story or one kind of African. And it’s not all child soldiers and acacia trees. There’s a variety of people and stories of cultures.”

“I think that the big publishers have to be very careful, because they are expecting authors to reduce themselves and their writing to stereotypes in order to be published, and then that is reinforcing the stereotype to readers, who are expecting certain stories. So, if the publishers are willing to take chances on different kinds of stories and different kinds of writers, then I think the public will, too.”

I ask her whether, with the current conversation about cultural appropriation, she wrestled with the kinds of characters that she felt she could write. “I have really struggled with that for a very long time,” she says. “It’s no secret that I’m white, and I am claiming to be African, and I think a lot of people will have a problem with that. As a white person, what are the stories that I am allowed to tell? How will people respond to it if I’m not just telling the story of a white woman? I do worry very much about appropriation. The one thing I have tried to do in my writing is to be very sensitive to who it is that I give voice to.

“I don’t really have an answer, I can only say that it’s never my intention to take away anyone’s voice. Rather, I’m trying to understand South Africa, understand Africa, understand what my place in it is.”

A condition of the scholarship she received is that 20% of her earnings from the book are returned, so that the foundation can continue to fund African writing. She is pleased that the longlisting means she will be able to give something back. “As writers we hate ourselves, we hate our writing, and we have to deal with rejections from agents and publishers, and then reviews and critics. Just to have that little bit of dignity for a year where you don’t have to be grabbing for money or doing jobs here and there. Just that bit of a

relief that it offers is so valuable and so I'll be very happy that I can contribute to that.

"Also I would like my publishers to have some success with this, because the pandemic has been really difficult for small publishers." It would, she says, be her way of saying thank you to them for taking a chance on her and her work. Thanks to the longlisting, 5,000 more copies have already been printed, and Holland House founder Robert Peett tells me that, in addition to Australia, they have sold translation rights to Greece and have interest worldwide.

[Rachel Cusk's singular novel stands out on wide-ranging Booker longlist](#)
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"It was one of those I knew we wanted within a few pages," Peett says, when I ask him how he acquired the novel. "I read it at one sitting and, to be honest, felt that one of the bigger publishers should have snapped it up. Selfishly, I am glad they didn't."

How, I ask Jennings, did she find the strength to keep going in the face of so little recognition? "I was never motivated by money or success, I've always just loved writing," she says. "As long as I believed in what I was working on [I kept going]. So it's not necessarily that I believed in myself, but rather that I believed in the work."

An Island is published by Holland House (£9.99). To support the Guardian and the Observer buy a copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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Thatcherism is the big Tory scam that still distorts our politics

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



The Iron Lady actually grew the state and put up taxes. But in her time, as today, high earners won and the poor lost out



Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Thu 5 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

Among the public services performed by journalism is alerting readers to scams, and the newspapers are currently full of them. When HMRC rings up, [threatening a court case](#) unless you press 1 on your keypad, slam down the phone. Texts from Royal Mail asking for money are about as kosher as marketing from [Charles Ponzi](#). And if an email arrives from someone purporting to be from the sainted [Martin Lewis](#), gushing over some new platform for trading bitcoin, it's a hoax.

Politics is also rife with scams – except that you can't depend on these being exposed by the press. The biggest and most pernicious whopper doing the rounds today is about Boris's Big State. It runs thus: the prime minister is an utterly alien breed of Tory. He loves public spending and big government, those things abhorred by Conservatives ever since [Margaret Thatcher](#) took charge of the party five decades ago and made it her central mission to roll back the state. The Iron Lady's legacy is endangered by the blond Nero.

Versions of this story can be spotted everywhere. In the Spectator, headlines [warn](#) that "the big state is back". Telegraph columnist Fraser Nelson [balks at](#)

“the rise of big-state Conservatism”. There is even panic around the Downing Street cabinet table, with David Frost – he of the ever-unravelling Brexit deal – [huffing and puffing](#) against “the intellectual fallacy” of a big state. And when Boris Johnson takes on Rishi Sunak over this autumn’s spending review, it will inevitably be painted as Big State v Small State: the most electorally successful Conservative since Thatcher battling one of her true believers.

Take all that seriously, and I can offer you [London Bridge](#) at a very reasonable price.

What’s wrong with this picture isn’t how it depicts Johnson, who clearly enjoys spending more on rail lines, tunnels, and anything else that demands a hard hat and a camera crew. No, the real misrepresentation is of Thatcher and what she actually did. This is greater than a run-of-the-mill falsehood. It is an out-and-out con: a lie used to swindle the public out of both money and options.

True enough, Thatcher wore her anti-state feelings on her sleeve. One of the very first white papers published by her government in 1979 claimed public spending lay “at the heart of Britain’s economic difficulties”. It wasn’t just a financial crusade – it was a moral one. Government was Nanny, and taxes reduced individual freedom.

And yet, over the course of her 11 years in power, neither the tax taken by the government nor the amount it spent actually fell. Thatcher’s enemy may have been supposedly big government, but under her it got even bigger.

Let’s start with taxes, because if there’s one thing everyone knows about Mrs T it is that she cut them. Except she didn’t. Although she grabbed front pages for slashing income-tax rates, especially for top earners, she also jacked up national insurance contributions, and VAT for shoppers. The result is freshly laid out in a paper in the Cambridge Journal of Economics (CJE), which [states](#): “The total value of central government receipts was 30.4% of GDP in 1979; by 1990, this proportion had risen to 30.9%.” Taxes actually went *up* under Thatcher, and the increase fell hardest on the less well-off.

On public spending, reputation again doesn't fit the record. Over her first four years in No 10, only a few programmes got cut, most notably foreign aid, even while she shovelled cash into domestic policing and an overseas war. Far from being the opposite of Johnson, Thatcher's combination of [free economy and strong state](#) is not so far from his own instincts. The overall result, noted by Kevin Albertson and Paul Stepney in the CJE, is that after inflation, "total managed expenditure rose by 7.7% from 1979 to 1990". Even flogging off BT and British Gas and all the other national utilities, and shifting those running costs and wage bills into the private sector, couldn't stem the rise.

Measured against national income, public spending did fall in the late 1980s, [writes](#) historian Jim Tomlinson, "as the economy recovered from the slump at the beginning of the decade". But, he notes, "When the economy returned to recession in the early 1990s [under John Major], the ratio again rose." However large Thatcher's boasts, and whatever the propaganda in the Spectator and the Telegraph, no miracles were worked here: there was no great lasting shift.

Thatcher did not roll back the state. Instead, she changed whom it serves and what it can do, in ways that still shape our world. Under her, high earners won big and finance became the UK's boss industry. At the same time, the state began using tens of billions in public money to pay for Thatcherism's consequences.

The biggest of all her privatisations was of public housing, with at least 1.5m council homes eventually sold off at a vast discount, costing the public about £200bn in today's money. Couple that with the scrapping of rent controls, and fairly soon the bill for housing benefit exploded, with the state paying landlords to house tenants. Similarly, breaking unions and driving down wages meant taxpayers subsidising low-paid work through benefits. Under Thatcher, that was family credit; today it is universal credit.

These weren't screw-ups, but a deliberate and profound transfer of money and power to the already well-off. Thatcher's most notable achievement was how she normalised this, "persuading the public to change economic expectations and assumptions", as the political scientist Ivor Crewe wrote soon after her 1987 landslide.

Those same expectations and assumptions course through this summer's debate over Johnson's thinking. Those warnings about a big state, predicated on a lie about Thatcher's rollback, are ministers and commentators effectively policing the prime minister. The belief that income tax rates can never go up was hardwired into politics by Thatcher and her chancellor Nigel Lawson, and has effectively removed the possibility of proper funding for both the NHS and social care. The sense that the state is always failing has been repurposed to justify everything from academy schools to Downing Street's [cronies getting billions](#) in Covid contracts.

This is what a 50-year scam looks like. The pandemic and its aftermath means Johnson will inevitably run a bigger state than either Thatcher or David Cameron, but he will do so within limits effectively set by her. His government will give taxpayer money to civil engineering firms and property developers, while ensuring that free school meals and an uplift to universal credit are deemed unaffordable.

Most newspapers will urge him to spend less, to shrink the state. But the rest of us shouldn't focus on whether the state will shrink – because, just as under Thatcher, it won't really. Instead we should ask for whom the state will shrink – and who is in line for an almighty payout.

Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionOlympic Games

As our Olympians bring us together, so our politicians tear us apart

Martin Kettle



Team GB's athletes embody a pluralist national vision, while political GB show us the worst of ourselves



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Thu 5 Aug 2021 04.00 EDT

I accept that the [Olympic Games](#) leave some people cold. There are those who don't like sports at all. There are those who are scornful about some activities that now qualify as Olympic sports. Then there are those who insist it is all a waste of money, those who think it's been poisoned by drugs and politics, those who bridle at the parochial media coverage and those who seem reflexively determined to dislike anything popular.

I'll admit there have been times, especially during the cold war and the drug scandals, when I dallied with some of those thoughts about the Olympics myself. But London 2012 blew them out of the water. That experience was almost universally positive. It was also unambiguously good for Britain. It would have been churlish and out-of-touch to ignore the shared pleasure that surrounded those games. This year, in very different and more difficult circumstances, Tokyo 2020 has confirmed that conversion. These games

have also been a global affirmation. Most of the public is captivated. And the experience has been good for a battered Britain, too.

A lot of that is down to Covid. Tokyo 2020 has turned out to be more life-affirming than anyone had any right to expect amid so much global distress. At times, this cultural embrace even extended to sporting rivals themselves. When 13-year-old Sky Brown [won her bronze medal](#) on Wednesday, reports highlighted how the eight skateboard finalists all showed fantastic camaraderie towards one another, cheering each other's daredevil skill and consoling one another after falls. Many medallists and competitors have said in their interviews that they felt inspired to excel as a defiance of all that the world has been through for the past 18 months.

But the Games have also confirmed the instinctive confidence with which the Olympics allow today's Britain to present itself to the world as a diverse and outward-looking society. London 2012 paved the way for that, of course. Danny Boyle's inspired [opening ceremony](#) gave modern Britain a capacious and pluralist national vision of itself for the 21st century. The athletes rose to the occasion and the public embraced it, not least in the life-enhancing way that the country so readily extended the embrace to the Paralympics too.

And in spite of the divisions of Brexit and the seductions of various divisive extremisms, that capacious nation is still very much there. It has shone out from the Tokyo Games. It has helped a lot that British politics has been kept at bay, at least thus far. Happily, Boris Johnson has not yet tried to insert himself into the Olympic feelgood mood in the way that he tried so abjectly during football's Euros in June and July. Whether he has learned from that mistake or simply has not yet got round to this particular photo-op remains to be seen. But the larger point is surely that Team GB have managed to construct and control their own narrative about the country without politicians, the tabloids or flag-waving culture wars of any kind.

You would need a heart of stone not to melt at some of Team GB's stories. Tom Daley's diving gold medal climaxed a career in the pool, but [his pride in being both a gay man and an Olympic champion](#) soared beyond the realm of mere sport. Who didn't feel just a bit better for a while about hard-pressed inner-city Britain when Kye Whyte, AKA the prince of Peckham, won his

[BMX silver medal](#) in Tokyo and returned to south London to pose for hundreds of selfies from young fans to whom, in his own words, he was “more like an older brother”? How fabulous, too, that these Olympics saw the birth of mixed male and female relays, in which Britain [also seemed to excel](#). How come it took until now to come up with that breakthrough format?

[Team GB make best start to an Olympic Games in modern times](#)

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There are, though, two very different Team GBs. In the Olympic arena itself, as in the BBC’s nightly Clare Balding and Alex Scott highlights programmes, and across the wider country, the sporting Team GB manages to be celebratory, inclusive and outward-facing. In the realm of politics, Team GB is almost a misnomer. British governance is riddled with division, meanness and mutual hostility. Scotland’s first minister works ceaselessly to break up the team. The UK prime minister [will not even meet her](#) when he visits this week. Wales’s leader regularly complains that London never listens. Northern Ireland, too, is mostly ignored.

Thirty-one years ago, [John Major](#) stood in Downing Street as Margaret Thatcher’s successor and offered the healing hope of “a nation at ease with itself”. In his years in office he was not particularly successful at achieving that. However, one of Major’s legacies was the national lottery. After a poor British performance at the 1996 Olympics, he also set up the lottery-funded National Sport Academy. Subsequent British Olympic successes, including those in Tokyo, owe much to these moves, and thus to Major’s view of Britain.

Team GB has come closer than most to creating, albeit briefly, a modern country at ease with itself. The contrast with the non-team of political GB is painful. Nine years on from the London Games, the disjunction between the country we wanted to be in 2012, and almost became, and the country we are now in fact becoming is glaring. In the Olympics we may think we glimpse the best of ourselves, and perhaps a hope for the future. In politics we currently see the worst, amid a deepening fear about what is to come.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist
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Is Alexander Lukashenko trying out the ‘madman’ theory of foreign policy?

[Andrew Wilson](#)

The Belarusian dictator’s unpredictability is unsettling opponents and allies alike. He must be checked



Alexander Lukashenko ‘can no longer be allowed to act with such impunity’. Photograph: Nikolay Petrov/AP

Alexander Lukashenko ‘can no longer be allowed to act with such impunity’. Photograph: Nikolay Petrov/AP

Wed 4 Aug 2021 10.09 EDT

These have been busy times for the rogue state of [Belarus](#).

In recent days, an opposition activist, Vitaly Shyshov, was [found dead](#) – hanging from a tree in a park in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv – in what is now officially a [murder case](#). Shyshov headed an NGO that helped Belarusians escape from the ever-increasing repression back home, having himself fled in 2020. The Olympic 200m sprinter [Krystsina Tsimanouskaya](#) narrowly escaped being bundled on to a [plane](#) back home from Tokyo, and has been granted a humanitarian visa by Poland. And the EU commissioner for home affairs, Sweden's Ylva Johansson, flew to Lithuania to try to do something about Belarus's state-organised smuggling of migrants over the border into its neighbour (the government in Minsk has been accused of organising flights from Baghdad to Belarus: migrants are led by guides to the border, and the whole operation is advertised [on social media](#)).

Is there a pattern? The hijacking of a Ryanair flight in May and the arrest of social media activist Raman Pratasevich were a [warning](#) to all opponents abroad that they would never be safe. Leaked documents and recordings have shown the Belarusian leadership allegedly plotting murders [in Germany](#), back in 2012. In the same year, what is still called the Belarusian KGB was allegedly recorded [referring to](#) another émigré, the journalist Pavel Sheremet, as “a massive pain in the arse”, saying “the president is waiting for these operations”. Sheremet's [murder](#) by a car bomb in Kyiv in 2016 remains unsolved. Another leak had President [Alexander Lukashenko](#) reportedly threatening to build barbed wire concentration [camps](#) in Belarus. Since his arrest, Pratasevich has featured not once but [several](#) times in what are effectively hostage videos on Belarusian TV, alongside its increasingly hysterical propaganda about armed coups and chimerical plots against the president's life.

Lukashenko may not have read many biographies of Richard Nixon, but he seems to be testing out the US president's “[madman](#)” theory of foreign policy, according to which unpredictability and rash behaviour are actually an asset, unsettling opponents and even allies. In this case, softer EU states will be worrying if the sanctions now in place against Belarus are worth the trouble. President Vladimir Putin also seems to be a target. He and Lukashenko have met many times since the [fraudulent elections](#) and mass protests in August 2020; but Putin has repeatedly refused to write him a

blank cheque. Another reason for provoking conflict with the west is to draw Putin closer in.

The Belarusian pirate state is now multiply rogue. Coercion is so far off the scale that the west does not know how to respond. As of June 2021, there are reportedly 526 political prisoners in jail, with nearly [4,700 show trials](#) since last year's sham elections. The UN special rapporteur on human rights for Belarus, Anaïs Marin, reported to the security council that 35,000 have been [arrested](#) since August 2020. There is a growing refugee crisis: the likes of Pratasevich, who had been based in Warsaw, Shyshov and now Tsimanouskaya are just three of the [tens of thousands](#) who have left Belarus since August 2020. Foreign policy unpredictability is everywhere. In June, Belarus walked out of the EU's eastern partnership, having been a founder member since 2009. In July, Lukashenko shut the border with Ukraine, citing stories of nonexistent arms smuggling, and threatening to open a second front in Ukraine's war with Russian proxies in the east. Lukashenko has threatened to flood the EU with drugs as well as migrants.

Economic piracy may be next. The economy is in a hand-to-mouth state of survival, but there are worrying reports of the surviving elite grabbing anything that makes a profit. The Russian word for this is [reiderstvo](#) – not just corporate raiding, but physical takeover. A moribund economy would exacerbate the refugee problem and the regime's siege mentality.

What is to be done? On 3 August, Boris Johnson [met](#) opposition leader Sviatlana Tikhanouskaya at No 10, but his warm words that the UK was “on your side” have not translated to much. The online investigators Bellingcat have said they will look into the Shyshov case. Belarusian dissidents need proper protection when they are abroad. Lithuania needs help with policing its forest border. The deaths in Kyiv of Shyshov and Sheremet underline the importance of helping Ukraine with reforming and modernising its security forces. The UK has helped train the Ukrainian army – a bill is now before the Ukrainian parliament to reform the over-mighty but often incompetent and corrupt SBU, the Security Service of Ukraine. The UK should also be looking at the London-based assets of the Russian and Belarusian oligarchs who prop up the regime.

Whether or not his madness is calculated, the country's dictator can no longer be allowed to act with such impunity. Though while protecting ourselves and other states, we should not forget that the biggest problems are for Belarusians themselves.

- Andrew Wilson is professor of Ukrainian Studies at UCL and the author of *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship*
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After my miscarriages I didn't need to talk – I needed access to better care

[Jennie Agg](#)

Until we shift the culture around baby loss, women will still feel abandoned, no matter how many times we say the taboo is being broken



‘In the UK, women qualify for support only after they have experienced three miscarriages in a row.’ Photograph: Keith Morris/Alamy

‘In the UK, women qualify for support only after they have experienced three miscarriages in a row.’ Photograph: Keith Morris/Alamy

Wed 4 Aug 2021 09.49 EDT

Taboo is an overused word in the media, isn't it? Miscarriage, in particular, is often described as one of the "last taboos", although I've also seen the label attached to menopause, periods, post-natal depression, finances, pelvic organ prolapse and male incontinence. When Carrie Johnson [announced last weekend](#) that she was expecting another baby this Christmas following a miscarriage that she described as "heartbreaking", the word surfaced again in headlines: "Carrie's rainbow baby helps shatter the miscarriage taboo".

I understand the impulse to reach for this kind of language. When I had my first miscarriage, four years ago, it was as if I'd walked into a cave of white noise. Leaving the early pregnancy unit that day with nothing to show for my three-month pregnancy but a pair of hospital-issue paper pants and a flimsy information pamphlet, I felt numb and empty – *emptied* – and tried to recall a single conversation I'd had about this. The best I came up with was a few lines in an old episode of Sex and the City.

So tropes of "breaking the silence" and "speaking out" feel somehow right. Despite being told by medics that it is incredibly common, when you suffer a miscarriage you still feel alone and adrift in a world that fetishises pregnancy yet encourages people to keep it a secret for the first trimester – when an estimated [85%](#) of miscarriages take place.

I went on to lose three more pregnancies in a little under two years. Each loss dropped like a stone into the empty places inside me, stacking up like a cairn to disappointment, lost possibilities and hypothetical children. I wrote about it all as I went, for newspapers and magazines, and also through my own blog. But I was far from the only one talking about it.

Since my first miscarriage, Michelle Obama, the Duchess of Sussex, Chrissy Teigen, Alex Jones, Myleene Klass, Stacey Solomon, Gemma Collins and Beyoncé have all spoken publicly about their losses. The MP Olivia Blake recently [told her personal story](#) in parliament, no less. Is taboo really the right word any more? Was it ever?

Johnson is not the first prime minister's wife to have gone public about a miscarriage. Cherie Blair lost a baby almost 20 years ago. The striking thing about some of the coverage from that time is how little things have changed. News reports reference sorrow and heartbreak. One feature consoles Cherie

that she shouldn't blame herself, that miscarriage is sometimes "just bad luck".

We seem unable to shake off a pervasive sense of fatalism that surrounds miscarriage. Many still perceive it as simply "just nature's way", a sad but ultimately natural and necessary kind of quality control. But this belief is premised on a misapprehension. Some experts [now believe](#) as many as half of all miscarriages are actually of healthy, chromosomally "normal" embryos. In other words, these losses could – theoretically – be prevented. Yet research into the causes of miscarriage is thin on the ground. As are reliable treatments.

In the UK, people qualify for further medical investigations only after they have experienced three miscarriages in a row. Even then, about half of those seeking explanations for their multiple miscarriages won't get any answers. Sometimes, all the best specialists can tell you is to "just keep trying". Unless miscarriage care and research improves, women will continue to feel abandoned and alone when it happens to them, however many stories they have heard about it before. We'll continue to play pass the parcel with the same scant, unsatisfactory medical facts year after year.

[My four miscarriages: why is losing a pregnancy so shrouded in mystery? – podcast](#)

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Although we are frequently reminded of how common miscarriage is, in the UK there is currently no proper, complete record of the number that happen each year. The baby loss charity Tommies finds that [20% of women](#) who have had a miscarriage will go on to experience clinical PTSD, while the risk of suicide is quadrupled.

A petition from the charity, which has [more than 222,000 signatures](#), prompted the government to agree to record the number of miscarriages each year as part of its women's health strategy. This is a long overdue step towards taking miscarriage more seriously, but there are still bigger cultural shifts that need to happen – such as workplace policies that mean women feel comfortable revealing they are pregnant early on without fear of redundancy, discrimination or the stigma of the "mummy track".

Sharing experiences can be powerful: I know first-hand that other people's accounts can feel like a liferaft. But I do wonder if, by framing miscarriage as a taboo, we risk implying that talking is the only remedy required – or even all that *can* be done. It's an approach that can unwittingly cover over all manner of data gaps, structural inequalities and inadequacies in medical care. Perhaps what we need to ask ourselves isn't so much why we aren't talking about miscarriage, but why we aren't listening.

- Jennie Agg is a freelance journalist specialising in women's health
 - *In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255). In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.*
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[Myanmar](#)

Myanmar's UN envoy accuses military junta of township massacre

Kyaw Moe Tun, who has defied regime attempts to sack him, tells UN it must take action over killings in remote Sagaing area



A protest in the Sagaing region this year against the military coup in Myanmar. It is alleged that troops tortured and killed dozens villagers in the region. Photograph: Facebook/AFP/Getty Images

A protest in the Sagaing region this year against the military coup in Myanmar. It is alleged that troops tortured and killed dozens villagers in the region. Photograph: Facebook/AFP/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse

Wed 4 Aug 2021 19.33 EDT

Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations, who has refused to leave his post despite being fired by the junta after the February coup, has alerted the world body to a "reported massacre" by the military.

Kyaw Moe Tun sent a letter to the UN secretary general, António Guterres, on Tuesday saying 40 bodies had been found in July in the Sagaing area of north-western Myanmar.

The junta has denied the massacre in the township of Kani, while news agencies have not been able to independently verify the reports due to mobile networks being cut in the remote region.

[Myanmar junta accused of crimes against humanity six months on from coup](#)

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The representative wrote that soldiers tortured and killed 16 men in a village in the township around 9-10 July, after which 10,000 residents fled the area.

He said a further 13 bodies were discovered in the days after clashes between local fighters and security forces on 26 July.

Kyaw Moe Tun added that another 11 men, including a 14-year-old boy, were killed and set on fire in a separate village on 28 July.

In the letter, the ambassador repeated his call for an arms embargo on the ruling junta and "urgent humanitarian intervention" from the international community.

"We cannot let the military keep on doing this kind of atrocity in Myanmar," Kyaw Moe Tun said.

"It is time for the UN, especially the UN security council, to take action."

It came as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) on Wednesday appointed an envoy to Myanmar after a months-long delay in diplomatic efforts to resolve the coup crisis.

Asean's foreign ministers said in a joint statement, delayed by internal wrangling, that they welcomed the appointment of Brunei second foreign minister, Erywan Yusof, as the bloc's special envoy. Asean, which operates on a premise of consensus and non-interference, has been under global pressure to help resolve the crisis.

The appointment of an envoy is expected to clear the way for Aseasn to send emergency aid to help authorities cope with a severe Covid-19 outbreak.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the [army ousted the civilian leadership on 1 February](#), launching a crackdown on dissent that has killed hundreds of people.

Kyaw Moe Tun has passionately rejected the coup and brushed aside the junta's claims that he no longer represents Myanmar. The United Nations still considers him as the rightful envoy.

The representative was sacked by the junta in February a day after he gave [a three-finger salute at the UN general assembly](#) following an impassioned speech calling for the return to civilian rule.

The “Hunger Games” gesture was widely used by pro-democracy demonstrators.

Kyaw Moe Tun, who has repeatedly called for international intervention to help end unrest in Myanmar, said on Wednesday that US authorities had boosted his security after an apparent threat was made against him.

“There was a reported threat against me,” he said. “The police and the security authorities here in New York are working on it,” he added, without giving details about the nature of the threat.

Myanmar's junta chief said on Sunday [elections would be held](#) and a state of emergency lifted by August 2023, extending the military's initial one-year timeline announced days after the coup.

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Israel launches airstrikes in Lebanon in response to rockets

Israeli military says jets struck rocket launch sites, in a marked escalation of hostilities



An Israeli fighter jet. Several incidents leading up to this week's rocket fire from Lebanon have focused attention on Israel's northern border.
Photograph: Jack Guez/AFP/Getty Images

An Israeli fighter jet. Several incidents leading up to this week's rocket fire from Lebanon have focused attention on Israel's northern border.
Photograph: Jack Guez/AFP/Getty Images

Staff and agencies

Thu 5 Aug 2021 03.54 EDT

Israel escalated its response to rocket attacks this week by launching airstrikes on [Lebanon](#), the Israeli military has said.

The military said in a statement that jets struck the launch sites from which rockets had been fired over the previous day, as well as an additional target used to attack [Israel](#) in the past. Several militant groups operate in Lebanon but none claimed responsibility.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) alleged the state of Lebanon was responsible for the shelling and warned “against further attempts to harm Israeli civilians and Israel’s sovereignty”.

The overnight airstrikes were a marked escalation at a politically sensitive time. Israel’s new eight-party governing coalition is maintaining a fragile ceasefire that ended an 11-day war with Hamas’s militant rulers [in Gaza in May](#). Several incidents leading up to this week’s rocket fire from Lebanon have focused attention on Israel’s northern border, and the US swiftly condemned the attacks on Israel.

The Hezbollah-owned al-Manar TV reported the strikes at about 2am, saying they hit an empty area in Mahmoudiya village in Marjayoun district.

Avichai Adraee, the Israeli army’s Arabic-language spokesperson, said the Lebanese government was responsible for what happened on its territories and warned against more attacks on Israel from south Lebanon.

Three rockets were fired from Lebanon into Israeli territory on Wednesday and the army responded with sustained artillery fire, Israel’s military said. The announcement came after sirens sounded in northern Israel warning of a possible rocket attack. Two rockets landed inside Israeli territory, the army said.

Channel 12 reported that one rocket exploded in an open area and another was intercepted by Israel’s defence system, known as [the Iron Dome](#). Israeli media reported that the incoming rockets started fires near Kiryat Shmona, a community of about 20,000 people near the Lebanese border.

The Lebanese military reported 92 artillery shells were fired by Israel on Lebanese villages as a result of the rocket fire from Lebanon. It said the Israeli artillery shelling resulted in a fire in the village of Rashaya al-Fukhar. In a statement, the Lebanese army also said it was conducting patrols in the border region and had set up a number of checkpoints and opened an investigation to determine the source of the rocket fire.

Lebanese security officials did not immediately confirm the Israeli airstrikes.

There have been several similar incidents in recent months.

The US state department spokesperson Ned Price condemned the rocket fire from Lebanon.

“Israel has the right to defend itself against such attacks,” he told reporters in Washington, adding that the US would remain engaged with partners in the region “in an effort to de-escalate the situation”.

At the United Nations, the spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, known as Unifil, was aware of the rocket fire and Israel’s artillery response. He said the Unifil commander, Maj Gen Stefano Del Col, appealed for a ceasefire and urged both sides to “exercise maximum restraint to avoid further escalation”.

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‘The Pied Piper leading us off a cliff’: Florida governor condemned as Covid surges



Ron DeSantis on Tuesday at a news conference. ‘You try to fearmonger, you try to do this stuff,’ DeSantis snapped at a reporter who asked him about the state’s record number of hospitalizations. Photograph: Wilfredo Lee/AP

Ron DeSantis on Tuesday at a news conference. ‘You try to fearmonger, you try to do this stuff,’ DeSantis snapped at a reporter who asked him about the state’s record number of hospitalizations. Photograph: Wilfredo Lee/AP

Ron DeSantis’s desire to keep state open amid Delta surge draws criticism from local leaders to the White House

[Richard Luscombe](#) in Miami

[@richlusc](#)

Thu 5 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

Florida governor Ron DeSantis earned a new moniker this week as the resurgent coronavirus continued to wreak havoc on his state: the “Pied Piper of Covid-19, leading everybody off a cliff”.

Dan Gelber, the mayor of Miami Beach, coined the term as Florida continued to set records for new cases and hospitalizations, recorded worrying increases in both deaths and rates of positivity, and led the nation in pediatric Covid admissions.

[Sharks fleeing toxic red tide take refuge in Florida canal](#)

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With the highly contagious Delta variant spreading, a state comprising little more than 6% of the US population was accounting for one in five of the country’s new cases, recording 50,997 in the three days to Tuesday, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

DeSantissays the spike is “seasonal” and opposes lockdowns or new restrictions. The Republican governor followed up his executive order banning mask mandates in schools by dismissed the burgeoning crisis in Florida’s hospitals as “media hysteria”.

“You try to fearmonger, you try to do this stuff,” DeSantis snapped at a reporter who asked him at a press conference in Miami on Tuesday about the state’s new high for Covid hospitalizations – a total of 11,863.

“Our hospitals are open for business. We’re not shutting down. We’re gonna have schools open. We’re protecting every Floridian’s job in this state, we are protecting people’s small businesses. These interventions have failed time and time again throughout this pandemic,” he said, referring to mask mandates.

The governor's single minded desire to keep the state open despite the Delta variant-fuelled spike has drawn criticism from local political leaders to the White House, where Joe Biden said on Tuesday: "I say to these governors, 'Please help'. But if you are not going to help, at least get out of the way of the people who are trying to do the right thing."

DeSantis, a likely Republican presidential candidate in 2024 if Trump doesn't run, and a possible running mate if he does, shares the former president's prioritizing of the economy.

But Gelber said he thought DeSantis's stance could backfire and end up hurting businesses.

"I'm the mayor of a hospitality town. I think most people coming here would rather be in a place that they feel safer than a place that they feel like they may be getting the virus," he told CNN.

"He's like the Pied Piper, just leading everybody off a cliff right now, letting them know that they don't have to like the CDC, they don't have to wear masks, they can do whatever they want in the midst of an enormous pandemic – and [Florida](#), by wide margins, is easily the worst state in the country."

The mayor said he felt "hamstrung" by legislation signed by DeSantis in May that gave him veto power over coronavirus mandates by municipalities.

"We're not allowed a mask edict now. We were one of the first cities to require it and the governor stopped allowing us to do it, then immediately we saw a surge across our county and state."

Charlie Crist, a former Florida governor and Democrat seeking to unseat DeSantis next year, said his rival's betrays "a blatant disregard for the health and wellbeing of children and teachers".

On Tuesday, officials in Broward county, the nation's sixth-largest school district, which last week voted to enforce mask-wearing, said they would back down, although appeared to be [reconsidering their position](#) a day later.

“With his latest stunt the Governor ignores science and the facts – that masks work,” Crist said in a statement to the Guardian.

“For the past year, masks kept Florida’s schools from becoming major contributors to the virus’s spread. They enabled our kids to be in the classroom safely. Now, with only a week until school starts back, Florida tragically leads the nation in children hospitalized due to the virus.

[Decimated by famine, Florida’s manatees face an uncertain future](#)

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“He wants to defund the school systems trying to keep them safe. It’s unconscionable.”

In an emailed response to the Guardian, DeSantis’s press secretary, Christina Pushaw, countered Gelber and Crist’s assertions that mask mandates were effective. In Texas, she said, cases declined following the lifting of a mandate in March, while in California numbers surged at the start of the year with a mandate in place.

“The governor and Florida department of health have always encouraged Floridians to protect themselves and their communities. The best way to do that is to get vaccinated,” she said.

Dr Jay Wolfson, professor of public health medicine at the University of South Florida, does not expect DeSantis to change course.

“The one driving force that most affects the governor’s decisions in the state’s policies is deaths. As long as deaths remain stable or under control, the rates of hospitalization and infectiousness are likely not going to elicit mandating masks or vaccines or doing anything else that would jeopardize the economic policies,” he said.

“Balancing public health policy interests against economic policy interests can be a delicate game and there are compelling interests on both sides.

“These judgment calls are not always based exclusively on educational or health issues, they’re based on political, pragmatic realities, and thus far the

governor has been successful in demonstrating he has a significant amount of political support for the positions that he's taking.”

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New Zealand

Meet the tuatara, the sluggish ‘living fossil’ with the fastest sperm in the reptile world

New Zealand researchers seeking to protect the at-risk species from a warming world have made a surprising discovery



New Zealand’s tuatara can reproduce until they are more than 100 years old. Now the race is on to collect sperm – the fastest-moving in the reptile world – from the creature. Photograph: Sanka Vidanagama/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

New Zealand’s tuatara can reproduce until they are more than 100 years old. Now the race is on to collect sperm – the fastest-moving in the reptile world – from the creature. Photograph: Sanka Vidanagama/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

*Tess McClure in Christchurch
@tessairini*

Thu 5 Aug 2021 01.21 EDT

Tuatara – the ancient, slow-moving, “living fossil” reptiles unique to [New Zealand](#) – have surprised researchers with their fast-moving sperm.

The discovery came amid a new effort by scientists to gather and preserve the sperm of the protected at-risk species, to try to ensure it survives new threats and a warming planet.

Tuatara themselves are ponderous creatures, sometimes taking 16 months to hatch, and 35 years to reach full size of about 0.5m. They can then live and reproduce until they are more than 100 years old – in 2008, Henry the Tuatara became [a first-time father](#) at the age of 111.

But researchers said they were surprised to discover that tuatara sperm are the fastest swimmers of any reptile studied to date. They [consider that speed](#) may “function as an adaptation to the lack of male copulatory organ” - Tuatara, unlike most other reptiles, do not have penises. Their sperm therefore have to swim faster – in this case four times faster than other reptiles – to aid delivery.

You basically just have to find them mating and separate a mating pair to collect a sample

Sarah Lamar, researcher

Tuatara are the sole survivors of an ancient, lizard-like order of reptile that walked the Earth with dinosaurs 225m years ago. According to the Department of Conservation, other species of *Sphenodontia* were common during the age of dinosaurs, but mostly became extinct around 60m years ago. Once widespread across New Zealand, tuatara now survive primarily on a scattering of off-shore islands where introduced predators have been eliminated.

Today, their existence is being threatened further by global heating. Tuatara sex is determined by the temperature eggs are exposed to – warmer temperatures mean more males hatch. As the planet warms, scientists warn that more and more male hatchlings will be produced, skewing sex ratios. If populations are too male-dominated, they will become functionally extinct.

Now, New Zealand researchers are engaged in a new effort to create an “insurance policy” of frozen sperm, that they could use to replenish populations hit by disease, introduced predators, or rapidly skewed sex ratios.

[A creature of mystery: New Zealand’s love-hate relationship with eels](#)

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It’s “insurance against disaster”, said Sarah Lamar, one of the researchers and a PhD candidate at Te Herenga Waka–Victoria University. “It’s never preferable to natural reproduction, but it is common among endangered species or species that are of conservation importance … It’s a really good way to back up that genetic diversity in case there were to be a disaster, and those important genes were to be lost.”

The process of sperm-gathering is labour intensive: researchers travel to offshore islands and try to interrupt amorous local tuatara in the act of copulation. “You basically just have to find them mating and separate a mating pair to collect a sample,” Lamar said. So far the researchers have successfully done so with 40 pairs.

Because researchers have not studied tuatara sperm before, Lamar said it was also a good opportunity to study what healthy specimens looked like, and which had the best chance of fertilisation.

Tuatara are a unique species, so there are additional challenges for researchers puzzling out how to preserve their sperm. “It takes a really long time to figure this out, and if you wait until you desperately need it, it’s too late – because it can take years to perfect,” Lamar said. “So we’re getting started now.”

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WPP

WPP revenues back to pre-Covid levels as advertising rebounds

Recovery to pre-pandemic levels at world's biggest ad group has come a year earlier than predicted



Mark Read, the chief executive of WPP. 'We are very pleased. We have returned to 2019 levels in 2021, a year ahead of our plan.' Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Mark Read, the chief executive of WPP. 'We are very pleased. We have returned to 2019 levels in 2021, a year ahead of our plan.' Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

[Mark Sweeney](#)

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Thu 5 Aug 2021 05.55 EDT

WPP, the world's biggest advertising group, has grown its revenues back to pre-pandemic levels a year sooner than expected because of a record-setting

rebound in global marketing spend.

WPP reported that underlying revenues increased by 19.3% in the second quarter, the fastest rate of growth the company has ever recorded, with clients ploughing money into advertising and marketing as the post-pandemic business recovery continued apace.

The group, which raised its full-year guidance after beating City expectations, reported a 16% rise in like-for-like revenues to £6.1bn in the first half of the year.

“We are very pleased,” said Mark Read, the chief executive at WPP. “We expect momentum to continue in the second half of the year. “We have returned to 2019 levels in 2021, a year ahead of our plan, with good momentum into 2022.”

WPP said [the global advertising recovery](#) was being driven by clients focusing more of their budgets on digital media. GroupM, the group media buying arm of WPP, is predicting global ad growth of 19% this year. Within that, digital media spend will rise at 21% while TV ad spend will increase by 9%.

Revenues grew in all regions in the first half of the year. The UK and western continental Europe showed the strongest growth, with revenues up 22% and 24% respectively on a like-for-like basis.

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While business is booming, progress on a return to office working remains slow in many of WPP’s markets. [In the UK](#), where WPP employs about 10,000 people, on any given working day about 9% of staff are in the office, while in the US the rate is just 5%. In Europe, Germany is at 15% and Italy 20%. In China, 79% of staff are in on an average day.

“I think the important thing to point out is that these results – record net sales growth and a vast improvement in profitability – were achieved with the majority of staff working from home,” said Read. “In the short term it is

manageable, but over the long term we will get back to a bit more of a balance.”

Shares in WPP rose by 2.2% in early trading.

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Laura Kenny becomes first British woman to win gold at three Olympics

- Madison masterclass hands gold to Kenny and Katie Archibald
- Jack Carlin takes bronze in the men's sprint



Laura Kenny and Katie Archibald celebrate their gold on the track at the Tokyo Olympics. Photograph: Kacper Pempel/Reuters

Laura Kenny and Katie Archibald celebrate their gold on the track at the Tokyo Olympics. Photograph: Kacper Pempel/Reuters

[Justin McCurry](#) at Izu Velodrome

Fri 6 Aug 2021 05.43 EDT

Where to begin when celebrating the achievements of an athlete such as [Laura Kenny](#)? With her Olympic gold medal in the women's madison, seized with unshakeable confidence alongside her riding partner Katie Archibald, at the Izu Velodrome on Friday?

Or with her status, thanks to that victory, as Britain's most decorated female Olympian, level with the equestrian Charlotte Dujardin with a haul of six medals? Perhaps it would be more appropriate to mention first that she is the only British woman to win a gold medal at three successive Games. And then there is the small matter of her status as the most successful female cyclist in Olympic history, surpassing the Dutchwoman Leontien Zijlaard-van Moorsel.

[How Kenny and Archibald pulled off magical madison for Olympic gold | William Fotheringham](#)

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After embracing Archibald on the podium, Kenny – with five Olympic gold medals and a silver to her name – narrowed her focus to a second straight day of spirited British cycling at Izu, where they dominated the field and wowed local spectators whose willingness to observe rules discouraging cheering appears to be weakening by the day.

Kenny had punched the air in front of those same fans at the end of the first Olympic women's madison, the climax of 120 laps of what at times appeared chaotic but for which the British pair had a masterplan they executed with terrifying precision.

"I think they're making these records up as they go along," joked Kenny who – if she can bear to process another statistic – is only a single Olympic gold behind her husband, Jason, who could add to his six in the men's keirin at the weekend. Laura can also increase her own medal total in the omnium on Sunday.

After the [team pursuit missteps earlier in the week](#), some of the tension that seemed to hover around Team GB is lifting after two days in which they have claimed golds in the madison, [the men's omnium](#) and, as Friday's racing drew to a close, a bronze medal for Jack Carlin in the men's individual sprint.

"It's unbelievable. I'm just so glad," Kenny said. "I've never wanted to win a race so badly in all my life. That was the one. I messaged Jason this morning and said: 'I feel like my Olympics ends today.' The one race I really wanted to do was this, and we went and did it."

Its Olympic debut status means there is no precedent in which to frame Kenny and Archibald's madison feat, but even so, the details suggest a win this comprehensive is unlikely to be repeated soon. By the end of the 120 laps, they had won 10 of the 12 sprints – including the double points for the last lap – to finish with 78 points, more than twice the tally of second-placed Denmark on 35.

Asked what it felt like to be become the first female British Olympian to win a gold medal at three successive Olympics, Kenny told the BBC: “It’s unbelievable. I am just so glad. I have never wanted to win a race so badly in my life. It was giving me fears like never before. But we went and did it.”

And she had a message for her son, Albie, at home in the UK. “I have never missed him so much in all my life. It’s so hard leaving him at home. To have Katie here – it feels as if I am racing with my sister. I couldn’t have done it without her.”

Archibald, celebrating her second Olympic gold medal five years after victory in the team pursuit in Rio, admitted that nerves had threatened to get the better of her on the morning of the race.



Katie Archibald and Laura Kenny are congratulated after their gold.
Photograph: Tim de Waele/Getty Images

“I’ve never wanted something so much and I’ve never been so nervous,” she said, before thanking their coach, Monica Greenwood. “We’ve been really clinical in our approach to this, none of this would have happened without Monica. We had a change of coach last year, totally overhauled our entire approach to this event.

“I feel like we’re going after the all-round at this track Olympics spreading between madison and omnium, and it feels so satisfying for it to come off.”

The British pair looked in control from the start, winning the first three sprints on the track and then further extending their advantage after the Dutch pair of Kirsten Wild and Amy Pieters, the reigning world champions, were caught in a crash with a little over 70 laps remaining.

In the second half of the race the British duo got themselves in a series of breakaways, hoovering up points in the sprints and gaining a lap with a little over 20 to go to build an all-but-insurmountable lead.

The second half of the track cycling events at Tokyo 2020 are proving more fertile ground for Team GB. While the scale of Kenny and Archibald’s achievement was still sinking in, Carlin beat the ROC’s Dennis Dmitriev 2-0 to take the bronze medal in the men’s sprint.

The Dutch rider Harrie Lavreysen rallied to win gold after his compatriot, Jeffrey Hoogland, won the first race of the best-of-three final.

Carlin could add to his haul when he competes in the keirin. “It was a tough day today, I didn’t have the same in the legs as I did yesterday but I gave it my all and managed to come away with something,” he said.

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A day after Katy Marchant's involvement in a crash that saw the Dutch rider Laurine van Riessen sprawled on the track with concussion, she advanced to the quarter-finals of the women's sprint.

"I wasn't 100% sure how I was feeling this morning," said Marchant, who broke her own British record in qualifying, eighth fastest. "I was still a little bit battered and bruised after yesterday. But the legs are feeling good. It's just riding through the rounds now and hopefully after another night's sleep tonight I'll feel even better tomorrow."

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Tokyo Olympics: golds for Kenny and Archibald, silver for Muir and more – as it happened

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

IOC strips two Belarus Olympic coaches of accreditation over Tsimanouskaya scandal

Artur Shumak and Yuri Moisevich leave 2020 Tokyo Olympic village as investigation into efforts to force sprinter home continue

- [Tokyo 2020 Olympics: athletics, cycling, modern pentathlon and more – live!](#)

00:56

Olympic sprinter on her refusal to return to Belarus – video

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Fri 6 Aug 2021 12.28 EDT

The [International Olympic Committee](#) (IOC) has expelled two Belarusian coaches who pulled sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya from the Olympic Games and tried to force her to board a flight home to Minsk.

The athletics head coach, Artur Shumak, and team official Yuri Moisevich had their accreditations rescinded and were asked to leave the Olympic village, the organisation announced in a Twitter post on Friday.

“In the interest of the wellbeing of the athletes of the [National Olympic Committee] of [Belarus](#) who are still in Tokyo and as a provisional measure, the IOC cancelled and removed last night the accreditations of the two coaches,” the organisation wrote.

Notably, the two men were allegedly heard on leaked audio where they threatened and cajoled Tsimanouskaya to cease her public criticism of the national team.

“You’re like a fly in a spiderweb: the more you jerk around, the worse you get entangled,” a voice told Tsimanouskaya on the audio. At another point, one of the men told her that excessive pride “leads to cases of suicide”.

The decision to eject the two men from the [Olympic Games](#) may indicate that the leaked audio is being viewed as genuine and could signal tougher sanctions on the way for the Belarus NOC.

“The two coaches were requested to leave the Olympic village immediately and have done so. They will be offered an opportunity to be heard,” the IOC statement said.

[Belarus sprinter who fled to Poland tells compatriots ‘not to be afraid’](#)
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The statement also said an IOC disciplinary commission had been set up to “clarify the circumstances around the incident and the roles the coaches Mr Artur Shumak and Mr Yuri Moisevich played”.

“We are not the ones who made the decision, we are only executing it,” Tsimanouskaya said the two officials later told her, according to Reuters. “You have 40 minutes. You have to pack your things and go to the airport.” The decision, they said, had come from “high up”.

Tsimanouskaya had commented on Instagram about her coaching staff’s “negligence” after they failed to secure doping tests for several relay race runners and enlisted Tsimanouskaya in the race without her knowledge.

She said several coaches had then put pressure on her to feign an injury and to fly home to Minsk immediately, where she has said she felt she could face punishment or even criminal charges.

She managed to request police protection at Japan’s Haneda airport by using Google Translate and has since [taken refuge in Poland](#), where she was issued with a humanitarian visa. Her husband also managed to flee Belarus and has been reunited with her there.

00:56

Olympic sprinter on her refusal to return to Belarus – video

More than 35,000 people have been arrested in Belarus and hundreds have complained of torture in prison since protests began last August against its leader, [Alexander Lukashenko](#), and flawed elections that handed him a sixth successive term in power.

The Belarus NOC at the time had said coaches withdrew Tsimanouskaya from the Games on doctors’ advice about her emotional and psychological state.

Tsimanouskaya did not rule out a future return to Belarus, but said on Thursday she would only go “when it will be safe for me there”.

The saga has shown how Belarus’s crackdown has made any criticism of the country’s officials extremely dangerous, even if limited to professional questions about sport.

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Team GB's women secure bronze in thrilling Olympic hockey win over India

- Great Britain come from 3-2 down to win 4-3 in Tokyo heat
- Balsdon scores winner from penalty corner in final quarter



Great Britain players celebrate winning Olympic bronze after beating India at the Oi Hockey Stadium in Tokyo. Photograph: Adam Davy/PA

Great Britain players celebrate winning Olympic bronze after beating India at the Oi Hockey Stadium in Tokyo. Photograph: Adam Davy/PA

[Stephen McMillan](#) at Oi Hockey Stadium

Thu 5 Aug 2021 23.50 EDT

Bronze, gold, bronze. Great Britain's women made history by getting ribbon round their necks for a third successive [Olympic Games](#) – take note, men – thanks to Grace Balsdon's decisive penalty corner strike to win a thrilling bronze-medal match against India.

Who says nobody cares about losers' finals? This was a pulsating match, Britain racing into a 2-0 lead before India hit back with three goals in four minutes, only for the deposed champions to drag themselves off the canvas in the second half and eventually prevail 4-3. It was a triumph of resilience as much as anything else and also meant they become the first British Olympic hockey team, male or female, to win a medal at three consecutive Games.

[IOC strips two Belarus Olympics coaches of accreditation over Krystsina Tsimanouskaya scandal](#)

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Laura Unsworth, the 33-year-old midfielder, is a history-maker of her own, having played in all three of those campaigns: bronze at home in London in 2012, the fairytale gold in Rio in 2016, and now bronze again in Tokyo. “I’m speechless,” she said. “I’m just so proud of every single one of the girls. We dug in so deep today and to come away with an Olympic bronze medal after the last five years, it’s such an achievement for this group of players and I’m so, so happy.”

But could Tokyo bronze mean as much as Rio gold? “Out of all the cycles I’ve been part of, this has been my most challenging and as a team it has been our most challenging,” Unsworth said. “It probably is up there with the Rio gold medal.

“If someone had told me when I first started playing hockey aged 11 that I would win three Olympic medals, I would have just looked at them and gone: ‘You what?’ When I look back on my career I can think it’s been pretty special.”

The match was played in searing heat and in the third quarter Olympic hockey history was also made when the first mid-quarter drinks break took place as the pitch-side temperature reached 42C. It begs the question: why were the players being put through this?

The women’s football gold medal match had also been scheduled to begin on the same brutally hot Tokyo morning. But after some pressure the football was switched to the slightly cooler evening. It seems reasonable to think this match could also have been moved to sundown as an appetiser to the Netherlands v Argentina main course. Starting at 2.30am in London and 7am in Mumbai doesn’t do hockey’s exposure to the TV masses any favours, either.

But if hockey will for ever be a poor relation to football in the harsh world of headlines and sponsorship, and a bronze medal match in any sport is

always the bridesmaid, there was no mistaking the desire of Great Britain to go home with a medal.

From pushback it was a wave of red attacking India, whose goalkeeper Savita Punia was forced into two excellent saves in the first quarter as GB enjoyed the lion's share of possession. Thirty seconds into the second quarter Britain made the breakthrough. Ellie Rayer burst down the right and dribbled her way to the byline, then flashed a dangerous ball across the face of goal which was deflected into the net by an Indian stick.

Ten minutes later it was 2-0, a free-flowing move down the right finished in style by Sarah Robertson. Britain were in command. But India were not reading the script and the match was turned on its head in four astonishing minutes.

First, Gurjot Kaur swept past Maddie Hinch in Britain's goal from a penalty corner. A minute later she repeated the trick, a superbly precise penalty corner drag-flick levelling the match. India's tails were up and moments later Sharmila Devi was clean through but Hinch did enough to put her off.

But India were not done and, incredibly, scored a third when Vandana Katariya flicked home in a goalmouth scramble with Britain reeling on the ropes. Half-time could not come soon enough.

Sign up for our Tokyo 2020 briefing with all the news, views and previews for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The break gave GB time to clear their heads and they set off in the second half like a team possessed. Within five minutes the match was level at 3-3 when the captain, Hollie Pearne-Webb, fired high into Punia's net.

Britain turned the screw and they took back the lead three minutes into the final quarter when India were a player down to a yellow card, Balsdon's clinical penalty corner ricocheting off the backboard to cheers from the British contingent in the stadium.

From there it was game management to the hooter and a hard-fought medal. If the future is always going to be shaded orange in women's hockey given

Dutch domination, the future for GB feels pretty bright too after a tournament in which only the Netherlands stood head and shoulders above them.

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Wales will move to Covid alert level 0 from Saturday, Drakeford says

All businesses will be able to reopen and limits on people meeting indoors will be removed, first minister says

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Mark Drakeford, the Welsh first minister: ‘Alert level 0 does not mean the end of restrictions and a free-for-all.’ Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

Mark Drakeford, the Welsh first minister: ‘Alert level 0 does not mean the end of restrictions and a free-for-all.’ Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty

Images

[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Thu 5 Aug 2021 17.00 EDT

All businesses including nightclubs will be able to reopen in [Wales](#) from Saturday and there will be no legal limits on the number of people who can get together as the country moves to Covid alert level 0.

But face coverings will still be required for most people in many public places, including on public transport, in shops and in health and social care settings, and the first minister, [Mark Drakeford](#), continued to urge caution.

“Moving to alert level 0 is another significant step forward,” said Drakeford. “For the first time since the pandemic started, all businesses will be able to open and all legal limits on meeting people in indoor private spaces will be removed.

“Alert level 0 does not mean the end of restrictions and a free-for-all. But it does mean we can all enjoy more freedoms with the confidence there are still important protections in place to make sure our public health is being safeguarded while we are out and about.

“Even if you have been fully vaccinated, meeting outside is safer than inside. Let fresh air into indoor spaces, get tested even for mild symptoms, and self-isolate when you are required to do so.”

Face coverings will not be a legal requirement in hospitality settings where food and drink is served and exemptions will continue for those who cannot wear them. Everyone in Wales must continue to isolate for 10 days if they have Covid-19 symptoms or a positive test result.

However, adults who are fully vaccinated and children and young people under 18 will no longer need to isolate if they are identified as close contacts of someone who has coronavirus.

Wales also announced that it will replicate the changes around international travel being made in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to maintain the same [traffic-light system](#) as the rest of the UK.

[Ministers accused of destroying trust in England's Covid travel rules](#)

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However, the health minister, Eluned Morgan, expressed frustration that no UK-wide joint decision had been made. “Despite our continued efforts to press for UK-wide decision-making in this area, decisions for England have once again been made without engagement with the Welsh government or the other devolved governments,” she said.

“This is unacceptable – international travel policy affects all parts of the UK and Welsh interests need to be part of the decision-making process.

“We are extremely disappointed with the unilateral approach taken and believe there remain clear public health risks posed by reopening international travel while the virus is circulating globally. For these reasons, we continue to caution against international travel for nonessential reasons this summer.”

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Australia's Covid crisis: Victoria enters 6th lockdown as New South Wales cases hit new record

Three largest states under strict controls as Delta variant spread worsens and Sydney warned to expect more bad news in coming days

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The Sydney Harbour Bridge in New South Wales. The Australian state recorded 262 new locally acquired cases of Covid-19 in 24 hours.
Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

The Sydney Harbour Bridge in New South Wales. The Australian state recorded 262 new locally acquired cases of Covid-19 in 24 hours. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Martin Farrer

Fri 6 Aug 2021 01.26 EDT

The Australian state of [Victoria](#) has entered its sixth lockdown to join the country's two other largest states under varying degrees of coronavirus restrictions as the Delta variant continues to spread.

Lockdowns have been enforced across the east coast, including Australia's three largest cities – Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane – putting more than 60% of the country's 25 million population under strict stay-home orders.

Victoria, which endured [one of the world's longest lockdowns in 2020](#), began a snap, seven-day lockdown on Thursday in response to an outbreak of unlinked new infections.

[Misinformation on 27-year-old Sydney man's Covid-19 death spreads on social media](#)

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The latest round of restrictions include rules that have become wearyly familiar to Victorians – including only being allowed to leave home for five reasons, a 5km travel limit for exercise and shopping, and compulsory masks indoors and outdoors – and come only 10 days after the last mini-lockdown ended.

Hours before the restrictions came into force on Thursday night, [hundreds of people took to the streets of the state capital, Melbourne, to protest](#), chanting “no more lockdowns” and carrying placards. Police said 15 people were arrested.

The country's most populous state, [New South Wales](#), which is already in lockdown until at least the end of August, reported another record number of new cases on Friday with a total of 291. At least 50 of those were infectious while in the community, a number the state's premier, Gladys Berejiklian,

says must be reduced to zero before the state can emerge from lockdown. There was also one death reported, a woman in her 60s who had not been vaccinated.



A crowd of anti-lockdown protesters during a snap protest in Melbourne.
Photograph: Michael Currie/Speed Media/Rex/Shutterstock

Sydney – home to around 5 million people – is the worst-hit area, with many local government areas under strict stay-at-home orders monitored by police and troops.

Residents of Newcastle, the second-largest city in NSW, [also came under a week-long lockdown from Thursday](#) after new cases were likely linked to a beach party visited by some infectious Sydney residents.

Although the state is into its seventh week of lockdown, the number of daily cases and deaths linked to the current Delta outbreak continue to rise.

Speaking at her daily media conference on Friday, Berejiklian, leader of the state's centre-right Liberal National coalition government, said the situation was going to get worse before it got better and that people should be prepared to see higher numbers in the coming days.

“Given this high number of cases, we’re likely to see this trend continue for the next few days,” she said. “I expect higher case numbers in the next few days and I want people to be prepared for that.”

[Covid world map: which countries have the most coronavirus vaccinations, cases and deaths?](#)

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The other east coast state, Queensland, has been in lockdown since last Saturday. But there are hopes that curbs there could be lifted as planned on Sunday, after [only 10 new cases of the virus were reported on Friday](#).

The fast-moving Delta outbreak, which entered via a quarantine lapse in NSW, is testing Australia’s largely successful handling of the coronavirus crisis that has kept its exposure relatively low with just over 35,350 cases and 932 deaths.

But a [slow vaccination rollout](#), dubbed the “strollout”, which has been the responsibility of the federal government, has left the country exposed to the Delta strain. Only about 21% of people over the age of 16 have been fully vaccinated, leaving Australia ranked 36 out of 38 OECD countries.

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, has been severely criticised for the shortcomings. He has blamed the delay on changing medical advice on locally produced AstraZeneca vaccines over concerns of rare blood clots and supply constraints over Pfizer shots.

The government was under fire again on Friday after it emerged that it had tightened travel rules to mean that citizens who are ordinarily residents in another country [could be prevented from leaving Australia](#) if they return home for a visit.

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Ministers accused of destroying trust in England's Covid travel rules

Criticism from former government adviser comes as Labour claims changes were politically motivated

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Travellers arrive at St Pancras station in London from France. There has been confusion over the treatment of France in ministers' traffic light system. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

Travellers arrive at St Pancras station in London from France. There has been confusion over the treatment of France in ministers' traffic light system. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent

@breeallegretti

Thu 5 Aug 2021 13.55 EDT

Ministers have destroyed the public's trust in travel quarantine rules, a former government adviser has said, as [Labour](#) MPs claimed the changes for England were politically motivated rather than based on public health.

The criticism came after the [latest update to the traffic light system](#) that grades countries depending on their Covid case, vaccine and variant rate, in which a host of European destinations moved to the green list while others were downgraded from red to amber.

The transport secretary hailed the announcement as good news for travellers and the travel industry, but said restrictions on passengers would probably last into the autumn, and predicted countries may require people to be fully vaccinated [“for evermore”](#) to avoid isolation on arrival.

Grant Shapps said people would “have to settle down into knowing that this will happen” but that as more countries’ populations become inoculated “things will start to become more routine”.

Pressure is growing on the government to publish the rationale behind ministers’ decisions, including the methodology and breakdown of specific figures for each country.

The latest developments come as the UK’s daily coronavirus case rate surpassed 30,000 for the first time in more than a week. There were 30,215 new cases reported on Thursday, along with 86 deaths within 28 days of a positive test.

The Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) provide the government advice, but it is up to politicians to decide which changes should be made every three weeks

to the red, amber and green lists. The Office for Statistics Regulation recently rebuked Whitehall for “not making the data and sources clear”.

The Labour MP Yasmin Qureshi said the system was “becoming a politically motivated policy, which seeks to pander to foreign governments [from] whom the UK government feel they have a potential for economic benefit or profit”.

She hit out at the decision to upgrade places such as India to the amber list while leaving Pakistan on the red list, saying Pakistan was “clearly not in the UK’s designs for ‘global Britain’” and had a lower positivity rate than India, where the Delta variant was discovered.

“Many of these decisions appear arbitrary and without reason,” she said.

Ben Bradshaw, a Labour MP and member of the Commons transport committee, said decisions about the traffic light system were an “absolute scandal” and had “nothing to do with public health and everything to do with politics”. He cited Johnson’s initial [two-week delay](#) in putting India on the red list in April.

“The government has repeatedly failed to publish the detailed data on which its decisions are made,” he said. “Every other country in [Europe](#) does this, so the public and business can plan. Air passenger numbers in Europe have already recovered to about 60% of pre-Covid levels, while the UK figure is 16%.

“When the public inquiry into Covid happens, the government’s policy on travel is going to be a major focus. It has resulted in the worst of all worlds – one of the highest Covid death rates and the completely unnecessary trashing of thousands of jobs and businesses in our vital transport sector and the prolonged enforced separation of millions of families and loved ones.”

The Welsh government announced on Thursday that it would mirror the relaxation, meaning it now applies to the whole of the UK.

Peter Ricketts, a former senior Foreign Office adviser and ambassador in Parispicked up on the chaos caused by France’s earlier placement [on the](#)

[“amber plus” list](#), making it the only amber-list country from where travellers still had to quarantine for up to 10 days even if fully vaccinated.

He said ministers’ use of the traffic light system was perceived by the public as “arbitrary and poorly explained, and the constant tinkering has confused people and lost their trust”.

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Pointing to the [confusion about the treatment of France](#), which is expected to go back on the regular amber list from 4am this Sunday, Lord Ricketts said it was not surprising a French minister had accused the UK of discrimination. The move had severely affected bilateral relations and it would “take time to repair the damage”, he said.

Rosa Hodgkin, a researcher at the Institute for Government, said it was “very difficult to effectively scrutinise” decisions because of the JBC’s refusal to reveal how it weighs different data and ministers’ also taking into account other factors.

“Having such an opaque system leaves ministers open to the charge that decisions are politically motivated because it is very difficult to say

definitively what decisions are based on,” she said.

The Department for [Transport](#) was contacted for comment.

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Movies

Interview

‘Deaf is not a costume’: Marlee Matlin on surviving abuse and casting authentically

[Cath Clarke](#)



‘I had to get sober so I could think clearly’ ... Marlee Matlin at home in Los Angeles County. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

‘I had to get sober so I could think clearly’ ... Marlee Matlin at home in Los Angeles County. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

The only deaf actor to win an Academy Award discusses going to rehab, speaking out about William Hurt and starring in deaf drama Coda

Fri 6 Aug 2021 04.00 EDT

When early financial backers of Marlee Matlin's new film, *Coda*, expressed their preference for hiring big-name actors to play the roles of two major deaf characters – her onscreen husband and son – she threatened to quit. She told them that deaf actors should play characters written as deaf. “I said: time out. This is not right. It’s not authentic and it’s not going to work. If you go down that route, I’m out, because I don’t want to be part of that effort of faking deaf. I’m glad they listened.”

I can’t imagine anyone not listening to Matlin. Speaking from her home in Los Angeles, she is funny and warm, but there is something intense about her, almost intimidating. She sits straight-backed, her focus sharp. She is not a woman to mince her words – which are translated from American Sign Language (ASL) by her longtime interpreter and producing partner, Jack Jason, who is also on the call from his front room. The pair have been working together since 1985, just before she won the best actress Oscar at 21 for her first film role, playing a young deaf woman in the 1986 drama *Children of a Lesser God* – beating Sigourney Weaver (who was up for *Aliens*), Jane Fonda, Kathleen Turner and Sissy Spacek.

Matlin, 55, is still the youngest best actress winner and the only deaf actor to win an Academy Award. On TV, she has picked up four Emmy nominations – one for her role in the all-time classic *Seinfeld* episode [The Lip Reader](#), playing Jerry’s girlfriend. In *The West Wing*, she played the pollster Joey Lucas. She is now working on a project about how Prince Philip’s mother, who was deaf, rescued a Jewish family during the second world war. As an activist, Matlin helped push through legislation in the US [requiring closed captioning on TV and streaming sites](#). She can’t stand inequality, in her own life or anyone else’s.

She says she is still boiling at a spiteful comment in 1986 by the film critic Rex Reed: “[He said] I won out of pity – that I was a deaf person playing a deaf role, how is that acting?” Her eyes widen. “There are hearing people playing hearing roles; how’s that any different? That’s what we call ableism, or audism.” In her 2009 memoir, *I’ll Scream Later*, she illustrated the incident with a photo of herself asleep as a child, bare bottom in the air, captioned: “Kiss my ass Rex.”



'I could not wait to tell my story' ... Matlin and William Hurt in 1986's Children of a Lesser God. Photograph: Paramount Pictures/Allstar

How did those comments make her feel at the time, when she was meant to be enjoying a delicious moment of success? "They were trying to make me feel less-than as a person, 'handicapped', that I wasn't even able to do the work that I passionately loved to do," she says. "They were telling me no, that I should not be able to be in Hollywood. Who are they to tell anyone that? How dare they?"

Self-belief, and an instinct to prove people wrong, has been there since Matlin grew up in middle-class suburban Chicago. She was born hearing and became deaf at 18 months; in her early 40s, a doctor told her the cause was probably a genetic condition. A happy kid, she had lots of friends and a determined streak: "If I had my mind on a candy bar, I would get a candy bar. My drive was huge."

Matlin says she also had a temper and would get frustrated seeing her two older brothers playing music or picking up the phone to their grandmother. In retrospect, she believes she was angry at the ways being deaf isolated her. But, at about 11, something changed. "It was just a realisation of what my identity is," she says. "I knew that there was a big world. I knew somehow in my gut that I had bigger fish to fry."

Matlin went to a mixed deaf and hearing school and started acting at seven. When she was 12, Henry Winkler and his wife came backstage to meet her. Winkler became her mentor: “My Yoda”. When she moved to LA in the late 80s, she crashed in the Winklers’ pool house and ended up staying there for two years. She got married in their garden to Kevin, then a cop, whom she met in uniform, working on the set of a film. They have four children.



‘My drive was huge’ ... with her Oscar in 1987. Photograph: Bettmann Archive

Listening to her gut doesn’t always make Matlin popular. In 1987, fewer than 48 hours after winning the best actress Golden Globe for *Children of a Lesser God*, she checked herself into rehab. She had started smoking weed just before her first year of high school and could puff through 20 joints a day. Now she was taking cocaine.

Her parents, her agents, everyone, said it was the wrong time to get clean. “No one wanted me to go into rehab, because I had just made a movie and the potential of getting an Oscar was going in my direction,” she says. “And I said: ‘Yeah, but to keep going I need to take care of myself first.’ I had to get sober so I could think clearly.” Matlin was in the Betty Ford clinic when she found out she had been nominated for the Oscar.

On the night Matlin won, she was clean and sober, but her dream-come-true moment ended miserably – with an emotionally abusive outburst by her then-boyfriend, William Hurt, who co-starred in Children of a Lesser God. He was also up for an Oscar, but missed out. He had been dreading her winning. In I'll Scream Later, she described getting into a limo after a party, shiny gold statue by her side. Then Hurt got in the car and started laying into her verbally: “What makes you think you deserve it? There are hundreds of actors who have worked for years for the recognition you just got handed to you,” she remembers. “Think about that.” He then told her to sign up for acting classes.

In the book, Matlin detailed the physical and emotional abuse she endured during their two-year relationship. The pair met on the set of Children of a Lesser God; she was 19 and Hurt was 35. By the time of the [Oscars](#), they were media darlings – the onscreen couple who fell in love for real. But Matlin wrote about arguments that turned violent, that left her with bruises and cuts and, on at least one occasion, fearing for her life. She also wrote of one incident of sexual violence, after Hurt staggered into their apartment drunk at 4.30am.

[Responding to Matlin's memoir](#), Hurt said in 2009: “My own recollection is that we both apologised and both did a great deal to heal our lives. Of course, I did and do apologise for any pain I caused. And I know we both have grown. I wish Marlee and her family nothing but good.”

I ask Matlin if she found it painful to write these sections of the book. She shakes her head and fixes me a steady look with her shocking blue eyes. “I could not wait to tell my story, to talk about what I went through,” she says. Did she worry her revelations could damage her career? “I didn’t even give it a second thought, because it was the truth. It was my truth – and up to me to tell it my way.”

No one wanted me to go into rehab, because the potential of getting an Oscar was going in my direction

Matlin’s account of her relationship with Hurt was not widely reported when the book came out, but she got letters from women who had been through

similar experiences. How did she feel a decade later when #MeToo exploded? “I felt a vindication. I could understand the anger. I could understand the cry for help. I applauded each person who came out and talked about their experiences and understood that it isn’t easy. People got blacklisted – it happened to some of those actresses. If it happened to you, have a right to talk about it.” She also writes in the book about two sexual assaults in her childhood: the first by a female babysitter and the second by a teacher – whom she later learned was a repeat offender.

Behind Matlin, I can see honours and awards. Is her Oscar there? No, it is in the dining room. “Get it for me, please,” she says, looking away from the camera. Kevin, it turns out, has been in the room all along. While he is gone, Matlin tells me he recently broke his collarbone. “He’s just had surgery. So I’m making him lift an eight-and-a-half pound [3.9kg] Academy Award.”

I see Matlin’s funny side when her husband returns and she mimics a shocked and delighted I’ve-just-won-an-Oscar face and starts lifting her statue like a dumbbell. She certainly gives a terrific comic performance in *Coda*, a heartwarming and funny family drama set in a Massachusetts fishing community. It prompted standing ovations – and a bidding war – when it premiered at Sundance.

The title is an acronym for children of deaf adults – used to describe hearing kids who grow up with deaf parents. Emilia Jones plays teenaged Ruby, the only hearing member of her tight-knit family. Matlin plays her mum, Jackie, who is baffled when Ruby joins the school choir and discovers a talent for singing (“If I was blind, would you like to paint?” she jokes. Matlin says it was the hardest line for her in the film.)



‘I don’t want to be part of that effort of faking deaf’ ... Amy Forsyth, Daniel Durant, Matlin and Troy Kotsur in Coda. Photograph: Apple TV+

The film is a portrait of the lives of deaf people. One of the loveliest moments comes when Ruby’s singing teacher asks her to describe how music makes her feel. The question stumps her; she can’t find the words. Then she thinks for a second and signs her reply. For her, ASL is the language of feelings and expression.

What Coda doesn’t do is treat deaf culture as something that needs to be “fixed” – a criticism many deaf people levelled against Children of a Lesser God when it came out. That film featured Hurt as James Leeds, a trendy hearing teacher who gets a job at a deaf boarding school and shakes things up. Matlin’s character, Sarah, is a brilliant but damaged ex-pupil, now working as a cleaner in the school. Hurt has more screen time than Matlin and is a saviour figure to the deaf characters. Rather than captioning Matlin’s lines, the script had Hurt speak them back to her.

Children of a Lesser God is Matlin’s proudest achievement, but she says it would be done differently today, “with all the awareness of how it’s OK to subtitle, and I think that probably the perspective would be Sarah’s instead of James’s. A lot of deaf people would totally identify with the story of Sarah more than perhaps in the original film. But it was beautiful in the fact

that it was cast authentically. And I think that we need more stories like that, on television and in film.”

And deaf characters must be played by deaf actors. “Enough is enough. Deaf is not a costume. It’s not authentic and insults the community that you’re portraying. Because we exist, we deaf actors. We do a much better job of portraying characters, telling stories that involve deaf characters, because we lived it. We know it.”

Coda is in cinemas and on Apple TV+ from 13 August

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[Experience](#)[Life and style](#)

Experience: I accidentally bought a derelict house

We wanted to bid on a property. But auctioneers speak quickly, and this one had a strong Glaswegian accent



Cal Hunter and Claire outside their house in Dunoon: ‘Dunoon wasn’t Glasgow, but it didn’t look far.’ Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Cal Hunter and Claire outside their house in Dunoon: ‘Dunoon wasn’t Glasgow, but it didn’t look far.’ Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Cal Hunter

Fri 6 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

My girlfriend Claire and I had both been to Scotland just once before: me as a kid; Claire for a medical school interview. I'm English, she's Canadian, and we met in the French Alps in 2016, quickly grew close, travelled around Europe, then got it into our heads that we should move to Glasgow. Wanting a project, we looked at auction listings and found an apartment in Pollokshields, [Southside](#). It needed some love, but the starting price was £10k. Before deciding to bid, I'd spent a few nights sleeping in my van across the street from it. I liked it.

With Claire away, I ventured to the sale alone. It was my first time at a property auction. I took my seat and waited patiently. The problem was auctioneers speak fast, and this one had a strong Glaswegian accent: I was really struggling to follow. Thankfully, a brochure on my seat contained the details for every lot, while a screen behind the stage displayed its corresponding number. I ticked off each sale in my copy as we went, counting down.

When our listing was next in the book, I prepared for a bidding war to erupt: our limit was 40 grand, so I expected winning to be a struggle. When our property came up, something was glitching with the screen. I hoped other would-be buyers might miss their moment.

As things commenced, nobody else bid – I assumed people were tactically waiting. Here goes, I thought, as I raised my hand. £10,000? You, sir. I couldn't believe it when nobody tried to beat my opening offer. Then a few things happened at once: the gavel fell, the screen switched on, and the bloke next to me asked in my ear, "Mate, have you seen that place?"

I looked up, and was filled with dread. The number on the page in front of me and the one on the screen were definitely not matching. Someone had mentioned a few last-minute additions to the sale that hadn't been in the booklet. The penny dropped. What had I bought?

It had been the penultimate property, so I sat anxiously and waited. The last was the one we had meant to buy: it went for £87,000.

Auction over, I disappeared as quickly as I could to buy us some time, before anyone could take my money. With low battery, I desperately tried to

text Claire: I've bought something but I don't know what. Sorry. Could you have a look at it? Then my phone died.

When I finally spoke to Claire, she seemed unfazed. She'd looked at the place on Google maps, although, with all the hedges, you could see only one angle. Dunoon wasn't Glasgow, but it didn't look far. And 10 grand for a place to call home, how bad could it be? This was before we'd seen a single picture.

I called the auctioneers and confirmed we'd go ahead with the purchase. That's lucky, they said, you have no choice: in [Scotland](#), auction bids are legally binding.

I drove up to Dunoon to check it out. It looked close to Glasgow on a map, but I hadn't noticed the ferry you have to take to get there. I was excited at first, but then [saw what we'd bought](#) and thought: oh, Jesus. Behind the overgrown bushes and a sign that read "Danger, keep out" was a crumbling, rotting mess. There was mouldy furniture, graffiti on the walls and the ceilings were falling down; abandoned for 20 years, the water and electricity had been switched off – a chair had even fallen through the floorboards.

To make things worse, it emerged we had bought only half the building, so we spent the next six months buying up the other two derelict units. But it was a beautiful location, and it was too late to turn back. By March 2019, we had the whole place.

[Experience: I was stabbed while playing Hamlet](#)

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Since then, Claire and I have been working on our new home full-time, living in a caravan in the garden. It's hard work, but we've both learned lots – taking on so much has helped us grow as people. We've taught ourselves everything from masonry to computer-aided design software, plumbing and electrics. We set up [an Instagram](#) so Claire's family could keep up to date.

While quiet Dunoon isn't quite Glasgow city centre, we love it. The neighbours have welcomed us with open arms: stopping by with soup and lending us tools. It's a special place – if you're going to accidentally buy a

house, you couldn't do it somewhere better. Given the chance to go back to that auction, I'd put my hand up for this house, no question.

As told to Michael Segalov

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

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[10 of the best ...Culture](#)

From Brangelina to Bogart and Bacall: the best on-screen chemistry



Brad times ... Mr & Mrs Smith. Photograph: Allstar/20th Century Fox

Brad times ... Mr & Mrs Smith. Photograph: Allstar/20th Century Fox

A sizzling spark between actors can elevate a film, as these amorous double acts show



Peter Bradshaw

@PeterBradshaw1

Fri 6 Aug 2021 04.00 EDT

Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt Mr & Mrs Smith (2005)

This was the film that sparked a virtual supermarket tabloid-gossip industry. Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie play an outwardly respectable married couple, each with a secret kept from the spouse: they are both professional assassins. Then each gets a commission to kill the other. The film is a bit silly, but you can see the dark and dangerous spark between the since-estranged Jolie-Pitts.

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Lois Maxwell and Sean Connery Various Bond films (1963-1971)

Lois Maxwell's Miss Moneypenny is the personal secretary to spy chief M, and so keeps up a running banter/flirtation with 007. Maxwell's excellent performance as the demurely sensual yet poignantly smitten Moneypenny gave us the nearest [Sean Connery](#)'s Bond had to a relationship.

Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke The Before ... trilogy (1995-2013)

One of the most [compellingly real relationships of modern cinema](#). Jesse (Hawke) daringly approaches a young woman, Céline (Delpy), on a train. Outrageously he asks her to step off the train with him and hang out for a while in Vienna.



Duvet or don't they? ... Tom Cullen and Chris New in Weekend.
Photograph: Moviestore/Rex

Chris New and Tom Cullen Weekend (2011)

Tom Cullen and Chris New star as Russell and Glen in Andrew Haigh's lo-fi romance. They meet at a bar and go home for what they think is going to be a one-night stand, but the next morning they find that they have a lot to say

to each other. The chemistry is evident not only in how they have sex but in how they just hang out.

Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart To Have and Have Not (1944)

“You know how to whistle, don’t you, Steve? You just put your lips together and blow.” This is an iconic moment in the history of Hollywood: you can see the chemistry between the 19-year-old Lauren Bacall and 44-year-old Humphrey Bogart begin to snap, crackle and pop.

Anne Reid and Daniel Craig The Mother (2003)

Roger Michell’s film has a remarkable pairing of actors. Anne Reid, then 68, begins an explosive affair with Darren, a friend of her son, played by Daniel Craig, then 35. The sheer class of both actors persuades you that there could be something between them.



To catch a thief ... Jennifer Lopez and George Clooney in Out of Sight.
Photograph: Everett Collection/Rex

Jennifer Lopez and George Clooney Out of Sight (1998)

George Clooney is the easy-going, roguish, amiably incompetent bank robber who is quite good at everything to do with his job except getting away with it. Jennifer Lopez plays the federal marshal with a soft spot for the type of guys she's supposed to be arresting. The flame of love between the two of them is ignited when they're locked in the back of a car.

Amarah-Jae St Aubyn and Micheal Ward Lovers Rock (2020)

Steve McQueen's Lovers Rock features a little miracle of hope, joy, attraction and romance. It is 1981, and Martha (St Aubyn) is excited about going to a house party. Micheal Ward is Franklyn, the young man there who is instantly attracted to her. The vast majority of the film is about unconsummated sex, displaced into dancing and flirting.

Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung In the Mood for Love (2000)

Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung play two married people in 1960s Hong Kong whose respective spouses are having an affair. They are thrown together by their knowledge of this, which creates an intimacy that flowers into an affair of their own. The subtlety and intensity of their onscreen relationship is a marvel.

Anne Heche and Joan Chen Wild Side (1995)

The heat generated by Anne Heche and Joan Chen in this thriller powers the film. Heche plays a banker by day and a high-end call girl by night. Christopher Walken is a shady businessman who employs her services so regularly that Heche finds herself drawn into his life, and she begins an obsessive affair with his wife, played by Chen.

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[UK news](#)

Sky Brown helps ramp up UK girls' interest in skateboarding



Stefani Nurding, 33, at Stockwell skatepark. She has been skating for 10 to 15 years. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Stefani Nurding, 33, at Stockwell skatepark. She has been skating for 10 to 15 years. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Thirteen-year-old's Olympic bronze medal adds to boom in number of people picking up a board

- [To Balance is Trust: photographing women and non-binary skateboarders](#)



[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@sloumarsh](#)

Fri 6 Aug 2021 05.13 EDT

Millions watched as Sky Brown flew around the Olympic skatepark in Tokyo this week. Not only did the performance [earn a bronze medal](#) for the 13-year-old, it also sparked a newfound interest in the sport, with more people flocking to skate shops and searching online for skateboarding lessons.

Brown's success is adding to what has already been a great year for the sport, with the pandemic prompting a boom in the number of people – particularly girls – picking up a board.

[To Balance is Trust: photographing women and non-binary skateboarders](#)

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Neil Ellis, the head of engagement for Skateboard GB, said since Brown's achievement there had been a 20% rise in people searching for skateboard lessons on the governing body's website. The [London](#) skate shop Slick Willie's said it had enjoyed an uptick in sales the day after, although the full impact of her victory is likely to be seen in the next month.

It follows a surge in people buying skateboards in the buildup to the Olympics. Skateboard GB said sales of complete boards – a preassembled skateboard with a deck, trucks, bearings and wheels – at the dozens of skateboard shops they talk to rose by 31% in the last month.

The Covid pandemic has also helped skateboarding, with a notable rise among female riders. [Skateboarding](#) sales grew 34% last summer with a 21% increase in female skateboarders in the UK, by about 110,000 a year, according to Skateboard GB.

“We have a good relationship with skate shops around the country and they were definitely seeing a massive uptick in boards sold in the lead-up to the Olympics,” Ellis said.



Bianca 11: ‘Maybe more girls are getting into it because of the Olympics and also their friends doing it more.’ Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

The rise in women taking up the sport is in part due to great role models, Ellis said, giving the examples of Brown and 14-year-old [Bombette Martin](#). “They are both young and amazing and in the public eye,” he said, adding that more girls are going to skateparks, with a rise in groups such as Girl

Skate UK being set up to accommodate female skaters.

“They feel they can try it out and go down to a skatepark and realise it is not daunting and people are really friendly. It’s a great environment at most skateparks. If you go down you will see boys and girls from age four to 50 years old, and that is amazing,” he said.

On Thursday lunchtime, Stockwell skatepark in south London, also known as Brixton Bowls or Brixton Beach, has almost an equal number of men and women practising. Among them is 11-year-old Bianca, who has been skating for a few years and finds Brown inspiring.

“We saw a few videos of her training before the Olympics. Maybe more girls are getting into it because of the Olympics and also their friends doing it more,” Bianca said, laughing and nodding when asked if she falls over a lot.

Stefani Nurding, 33, has been skating for 10 to 15 years and says when she started she was one of few females doing it. “I have dedicated my life to getting girls involved so, for me, it is emotional to see girls in the Olympics.

“This is the best thing that has ever happened to women in skateboarding. I have never seen such equal coverage [of male and female boarding].”

She said Instagram had encouraged gender equality in the sport. “Instagram put women’s skateboarding on the map. It showed that people want to see women skateboarding and made a network so female skaters could talk. Now groups such as Girl Skate UK post events.”

00:24

'Everyone ripped': Sky Brown on 'insane' Olympic bronze in skateboarding – video

As well as more women skating, the pandemic has encouraged former skaters to return, according to Nick Warry of Slick Willie’s.

David Whitelaw, the founder of Native Skate Store in [Newcastle](#) upon Tyne, said its biggest increase in sales – 50% – came during the height of

lockdown last year. He said people had been left on furlough with more time on their hands so they were able to go back to skating or try it for the first time.

“Last year we had loads of girls taking up skateboarding and older guys on furlough who had time to practise tricks over and over again,” he said. “I think this year we are about to see an uplift and maybe more younger kids trying it out.”

Whitelaw hopes the rise will be matched by more skateboarding facilities, but notes there is more space than when he was a child. “I used to travel to Scotland for a skatepark as the only one in South Shields [in north-east England] was not good, but now there is a skatepark in every town … and with the next Olympics in Paris in three years’ time, there will be more facilities.”

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OpinionClimate change

Johnson's muddle over Covid is a foretaste of his thinking on climate change. Be afraid

Gaby Hinsliff



The prime minister's core belief is that things will work out, and there's no need for a plan B. We've seen how that works



‘This has been a biblical summer, one where the doomsday warnings have felt increasingly close to the bone.’ Wildfires in southern Turkey.
Photograph: Ali Ballı/EPA

‘This has been a biblical summer, one where the doomsday warnings have felt increasingly close to the bone.’ Wildfires in southern Turkey.
Photograph: Ali Ballı/EPA

Fri 6 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

First came the plague, then the flood, and now the fire. This has been a biblical summer, one where the doomsday warnings of climate scientists have felt increasingly close to the bone.

Horror stories of Chinese commuters [drowning](#) as underground train tunnels suddenly filled with water have merged uncomfortably in our imaginations with images of [flash floods](#) in east London, [wildfires](#) burning up the Turkish coast and a Canadian heatwave so fierce it [cooked mussels](#) in their shells on the beach.

So, with the crucial Cop26 climate change summit due to be held in Glasgow this autumn, why not seize the moment? Climate deniers, including those on the Tory backbenches, are on the back foot. New electric car [registrations](#) are up, as wealthier households emerge from the pandemic with

savings to spend: that pent-up consumer boom that the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, is counting on could easily be steered in a green direction as millions begin to recognise that we should do *something* to change our lifestyles but aren't quite sure what.

Are cars the priority, or getting rid of your gas boiler, or flying less, or something to do with diet? These are big decisions, the kind many people can't afford to make without help from the state. Even the comfortably off won't be confident enough to make them without reassurance from government that change really is now unavoidable, and clear guidance on how exactly to go about it.

But, puzzlingly, in an interview last week, all the prime minister's new climate spokesperson, Allegra Stratton, had to offer was tips on freezing bread rather than letting it go stale and [not rinsing plates](#) before putting them in the dishwasher – plus the eyebrow-raising confession that she personally "[doesn't fancy](#)" an electric car because stopping to charge it on long journeys might be a pain. (Never mind that, as numerous experts promptly pointed out, most new models have a range of 200 miles.)

Just when we most need clarity, what we get is two contradictory messages fighting for a confused public's attention: one that this is a global emergency demanding we move further and faster to net zero, and the other that we've got all the time in the world to play around with baby steps like freezing your leftovers.

Blaming the messenger, who only took the Cop26 brief when the job she was actually hired to do for Downing Street was axed at the last minute, is easy. But the bigger problem is the gaping holes in the message.

To change behaviour, first be clear and consistent about what you want people to do, especially if it's not something that comes naturally. That's a lesson ministers should have learned from a year of publicly contradicting each other over Covid – to the point where even the most well-intentioned now struggle to understand whether the government wants them to go back to the office, fly to Spain, wear a mask, or none of the above. Climate-change messaging is descending into much the same muddle, and that suggests a more structural weakness at the heart of government.

[Britain could be taking the lead in tackling the climate crisis. Where's the ambition? | Keir Starmer](#)

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This week a report from the Institute for Government, a thinktank with deep connections in Whitehall, ripped into the government's strategy for handling Covid in schools, suggesting education ministers were caught short – with no backup plan for cancelling exams, in part because of pressure from the top *not* to prepare for the worst. A No 10 source told the report's authors that there was a “clear steer” from the prime minister against making contingency plans because “if you prepare for these things not happening then the outcome is that they are far more likely to not happen … people will look for the easy way out”.

The idea seems to have been that if there was no safety net, everyone would jolly well have to make a go of the tightrope. Yet the tightrope still snapped, which is why it's worrying that the clearest signal now emerging from No 10 on a range of climate-related policies is that industry will work something out; that once their backs are sufficiently against the wall, businesses will simply innovate their way out of the fact that heat pumps are prohibitively expensive replacements for gas boilers, or that millions can't actually afford new electric cars.

It's true that the cost of green technologies is likely to come down once they're produced at greater scale. But the idea that tech alone can be compelled to save us is not a cast-iron strategy so much as an attempt to shape the world by positive thinking. Meanwhile, a detailed strategy for Britons to wean themselves off gas central heating – which was supposed to have been published already and would have given Stratton something concrete to talk about – has been [reportedly held up](#) by tensions between No 10 and No 11 over how to pay for it all.

What we're seeing on the climate crisis looks, in other words, wearily familiar: a combination of Boris Johnson's allergy to taking unpopular decisions, plus a preference for working in what his old consigliere Dominic Cummings calls an [atmosphere of chaos](#), where nobody is entirely sure what their mercurial boss wants or stands for, and thus finds it harder to oppose

him. Global emergency, meet political mindset spectacularly ill-equipped to deal with one. Haven't we learned by now how this movie ends?

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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I saw Afghan interpreters translate so much more than words – now they live in terror

[Clive Lewis](#)

These men helped me when I was a soldier in their country. Britain's refusal to help them reflects a racist history of denial



Former interpreters for the US and Nato forces during a demonstration in Kabul at the start of the formal US troop withdrawal in May 2021.
Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

Former interpreters for the US and Nato forces during a demonstration in Kabul at the start of the formal US troop withdrawal in May 2021.
Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 6 Aug 2021 01.21 EDT

The plight of hundreds of Afghan interpreters who have served alongside British forces over the past 20 years is becoming increasingly [desperate](#). They are hunted by a resurgent Taliban. They are executed for “collaboration”. They are ignored by a Home Office refusing to grant many of them a right of resettlement. Our national failure to acknowledge our obligation to these men and their families is a moral catastrophe. In putting things right, we might begin to rescue not only them, but also ourselves.

To the bureaucrats in government, the interpreters are not soldiers. They are mere civilian contractors, easily let go at the end of a job. That is not how it was to those of us on the ground in [Afghanistan](#), where I served a tour of duty in 2009. They were our ’terps. They patrolled with us, ate with us, sweated with us. When we faced the risks of improvised explosive devices and ambushes, the ’terps faced them too, at our side.

I was uncertain of the legitimacy of our presence in Afghanistan. In search of justification of my own place there, I turned to the interpreters, a natural target for my many questions. What did the Afghan people think of us being there, I needed to know. Did they trust us? Were they scared of us? In answering, they interpreted more than the language. They helped all of us to better understand the people, the place, the situation. And while nothing gave me clarity as to the politics, I recall clearly the young men laughing along with our banter, showing me pictures of their family and asking about my own, speaking plainly of their hopes and dreams for themselves and their country. These same men now live in terror. Hunted along with their families they have been abandoned by us, their comrades.

What kind of country asks people, quite literally, to risk life and limb for some obscure national interests and then deserts them in their moment of greatest need? The plight of homeless and jobless British veterans shames us, the covenant between state and citizen-soldier irreparably ruptured. It is no less shameful, and no less a breach of trust, when we fail to care for those who also served, though they are not citizens of this country.

The British state has form here. Our imperial past is littered with injustices perpetrated against black soldiers and auxiliaries serving with British forces. It is a history that is graphically expressed in Rudyard Kipling’s poem, [Gunga Din](#). The [Gurkhas](#) and [Fijians](#) were ignored and mistreated for

decades, outraging the British public. In the first world war, African soldiers were brutally treated and buried in unmarked graves. In the same war, Indian soldiers were denied treatment for shell shock. Black veterans of the second world war faced discrimination over pensions.

The explanation for this moral lapse is clear – though many will refuse to see it (and complain about having it pointed out): racism. The government and its outriders will claim it is “anti-British” to say so, just “woke revisionism”. They are noisily waging their own “culture war”, in which the main tactic is to deny the truth of history when it fails to conform to their romanticised, politicised and whitewashed invention. Imperial Britain was at the forefront of developing the concept of race and applying it as a tool of government, deciding whose suffering counts and whose can be ignored. And now, dreaming of a post-Brexit empire 2.0, the government insists, in official reports, that institutional racism doesn't exist in the UK. It can't be part of “our island story”. Perhaps Boris Johnson, instead of inaptly quoting Kipling, might read him properly: “You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!”

This mistreatment of Afghan interpreters is not a simple bureaucratic mistake. It is, like the Afghan war itself, the contemporary expression of a continuing historical legacy that we too often refuse to understand. But, maybe, it is also a chance to make the idea of “global Britain” more than an empty slogan, and to reconcile with, rather than hide from, our history. As global challenges and crises increase and intensify – climate, disease, conflict – Britain's potential contribution becomes clearer: hosting Cop26 and being truly serious about what is happening; sharing vaccines with a world that desperately needs them; reducing conflict rather than fuelling it with arms sales.

The world does not need us to lead it. It just needs us to work alongside others as we once worked alongside our interpreters. They helped me make sense of the situation I was in and to rethink my place in the world. Now is the time for the country to show solidarity to the ’terps who might once again help us to understand where we are, what we have done and what we might, in the future, do better.

- Clive Lewis is the Labour MP for Norwich South
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OpinionInequality

How politics became a contest dominated by two kinds of elite

[Amory Gethin](#), [Clara Martínez-Toledano](#) and [Thomas Piketty](#)

Studying hundreds of elections, we found that political parties increasingly cater to only the well educated and the rich



‘Tackling political crises will require giving back a voice to the citizens who do not feel represented by existing democratic institutions.’ A woman votes in Turin, Italy. Photograph: Stefano Guidi/Getty Images

‘Tackling political crises will require giving back a voice to the citizens who do not feel represented by existing democratic institutions.’ A woman votes in Turin, Italy. Photograph: Stefano Guidi/Getty Images

Thu 5 Aug 2021 07.45 EDT

Given the steep [rise](#) in economic inequality in many parts of the world since the 1980s, one might have expected to see increasing political demands for

the redistribution of wealth and the return of class-based politics. This didn't quite happen – or at least not straightforwardly.

To make sense of the big picture, we studied the long-term evolution of political divides in 50 western and non-western democracies, using a new [database](#) on the vote that covers more than 300 elections held between 1948 and 2020.

One of the most striking results that emerges from our analysis is what we propose to call the transition from “class-based party systems” to “multi-elite party systems” in western democracies. In the 1950s and 60s, the vote for leftwing parties in western democracies was “class-based”, in the sense that it was strongly associated with a lower income and less educated electorate. Since then, it has gradually become associated with more highly educated voters, giving rise in the 2010s to a remarkable divergence between the effect that income and education has on how people vote. People with high incomes continue to vote for the right while people with high levels of education (such as those with university degrees) have shifted to the left. This separation is visible in nearly all western democracies, despite their historical, political and institutional differences.

What explains this remarkable transformation? First, the classic answer invokes the increasing prevalence of identity politics. As questions related to environmentalism, gender equality, the rights of sexual and ethnic minorities and, more recently, immigration have taken a growing importance in political debates, new green and anti-immigration parties have risen in the polls. While income continues to differentiate social democratic parties from conservative parties, it is education that most clearly distinguishes the supporters of green and anti-immigration parties today.

A second mechanism that can potentially explain this long-run evolution has to do with the process of educational expansion itself. In the 1950s and 60s, the majority of voters had primary or secondary education at most. In this context, parties seeking to reduce social inequalities could simply aim to ensure everyone went through primary and secondary school. With the rise of tertiary education, things have become more complicated. Leftwing parties, which were once seen as defending greater equality of access to the education system, have increasingly been viewed as parties defending

primarily the winners of the higher education game. This arguably contributed to growing resentment among those who do not benefit from it, and a shift of some of them towards anti-immigration parties or abstention. As a result, the voting bases of social democratic parties have become increasingly restricted to the most educated parts of the electorate.

A third related mechanism involves the ascendancy of a global ideology that puts private property interests above all else, abandoning any sense that capitalism can be radically transformed. The moderation of traditional leftwing parties' platforms since the 1980s (think of New Labour), as well as in some cases their shift to promoting neoliberal policies, directly contributed to the decline of class divisions being perceived as politically salient, the subsequent demise of these parties, and the rise of identity-based conflicts.

Regardless of its causes, the consequences of this profound transformation are quite clear. As political systems have effectively come to represent two kinds of elites – the well-educated and the rich – they have left little space for the expression of the interests of the most disadvantaged citizens. Abstention, in Britain as in the majority of western democracies, has skyrocketed among low-income and lower-educated citizens in the past decades. In a remarkable book, Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley show how this “political exclusion of the British working class” was triggered by political parties and the mass media giving an ever-decreasing attention to questions of inequality. Class is not dead, as three political scientists emphatically stated 15 years ago: it has been buried alive.

There is, however, at least one object of political conflict that continues to clearly divide voters along class lines in one part of the world: Europe. Our analysis showed that in every referendum held in the European Union since the 1970s, low-income and less well-educated voters have converged in expressing their opposition to further supranational integration. In some sense, this is not surprising. In a union focused almost exclusively on the liberalisation of human and capital flows and the imposition of stringent fiscal rules, there is little to gain for those workers who most suffer from the shocks induced by the unregulated global capitalism of the 21st century. Brexit represented the culmination of this long-run process. In 2016, only 35% of the poorest 10% of UK voters voted remain, compared to nearly two

thirds of those belonging to the richest decile. For the first time in several decades, many citizens who had been both politically and socially left behind – including those who bore the burden of the post-2008-crisis austerity measures – were able to voice their concerns.

Many worry that in this age of globalisation, economic insecurity and cultural anxiety has allowed “populism” to irrevocably take root in our political systems. Our findings suggest that the groundwork for this may have been laid, in part, by the rise of a new form of “elitism” over several decades. Tackling the political crises faced by western democracies will require giving back a voice to the many citizens who do not feel represented by existing democratic institutions. Above all, it will require designing sufficiently ambitious and credible platforms to convince them that globalisation and technical change can serve the interests of more than a narrow minority.

- Amory Gethin, Clara Martínez-Toledano and Thomas Piketty are the authors of Political Cleavages and Social Inequalities: A Study of Fifty Democracies, 1948-2020
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What do many terrorists have in common? They abuse women

[Joan Smith](#)

Groundbreaking research shows that extremist attackers are often united in their violent misogyny, whatever their ideology



Flowers at an entrance to Fryent Country Park, in Wembley, north London, where Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry were killed. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Flowers at an entrance to Fryent Country Park, in Wembley, north London, where Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry were killed. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Thu 5 Aug 2021 09.00 EDT

Five years ago, I began to notice that the perpetrators of some of the worst terrorist attacks had something in common. A high proportion shared a

history of assaulting wives, girlfriends and other female relatives, sometimes involving a whole series of victims, long before they attacked total strangers.

In the summer of 2016, for example, when just two terrorist attacks in [Florida](#) and the [south of France](#) left 135 people dead and hundreds injured, both perpetrators claimed to be Islamists. But I was struck by the fact that each had a horrific record of domestic violence.

A year later, there were four fatal attacks in the UK and all six perpetrators turned out either to have abused women or, in one case, to have witnessed his father abusing his mother and sister. There were striking similarities between the histories of [Darren Osborne](#), the rightwing extremist who drove a van into worshippers leaving a mosque in north London, and [Khalid Masood](#), the Islamist who staged an attack on Westminster Bridge. Both men had criminal records for violent offences – and both had abused women.

I thought these cases challenged conventional wisdom about terrorism, which holds that it is all about ideology. Many fatal terrorist attacks actually appeared to be an escalation of violence that had been going on, sometimes for years, against members of the perpetrator's family. I was convinced that the police and MI5 needed to change the way they assessed the risk posed by suspects, treating a history of domestic violence as a very significant red flag.

When I raised this with the authorities, however, I encountered scepticism and disbelief. So I decided to write a book, using published sources to piece together a woeful catalogue of men who had humiliated, beaten and sexually assaulted women long before they became notorious as terrorists. It was published in 2019 and this time senior figures at counter-terrorism policing and the Home Office listened.

They commissioned groundbreaking research using data on just over 3,000 referrals to the Prevent programme in England and Wales in 2019 – adults and children who had caused concern to teachers, social workers and family members because of a possible vulnerability to radicalisation (V2R). The results of what came to be called Project Starlight have not yet been published, but I have been given access to them – and they are stunning.

Almost 40% of adult referrals had a history of domestic abuse either as perpetrators, witnesses or victims – or a combination of all three. This is likely to be an underestimate, given that domestic violence is one of the most under-reported crimes, but it provides some idea of prevalence for the first time. The comparable figure for children is 30%, another likely underestimate because under-16s were not routinely questioned about domestic abuse in the home.

There were many more men than women among the sample and the research showed another significant difference between the sexes: male referrals were more likely to be perpetrators of domestic abuse, while the women were more likely to be victims. But what is really shocking is the extent and seriousness of the violence disclosed in family histories. “Incidents recorded ranged from children witnessing domestic abuse in their households to people being convicted of the attempted murder of their partner.”

As I expected, the link is visible across ideologies, from Islamists and rightwing extremists to the fifth of the sample where no known ideology was identified. This confirms my theory that terrorism is at least as much about male violence as ideology, suggesting that angry young men are attracted to extremist ideas that appear to “justify” their grievances. The route from victim to perpetrator is not inevitable but it is well known, and the research reveals that almost 16% of adult V2R referrals had been victims of domestic abuse, nearly three times higher than the estimated national figure.

Take the tragic case of the [Deghayes brothers](#) from Brighton. After enduring years of violence at the hands of their father, 18-year-old Amer Deghayes fled to Syria where he joined a terrorist organisation, the al-Nusra Front, in 2013. Two younger brothers followed and were killed within months of their arrival. Another brother, who had remained in Brighton, was convicted of drugs offences and stabbed to death in 2019. The cost of violence in the home is unacceptably high.

Another reason why extremist organisations appeal to aggrieved men is, I’m afraid, their misogyny. When the Project Starlight researchers looked for a link between V2R referrals and hate crime, they did not find it – but they *did* find one with woman-hating. Indeed so-called incels – bitter young men who

blame women for their inability to get sex – have carried out fatal attacks in the US and Canada.

A recent horrific case suggests that counter-terrorism officials need to be alert to the possibility that extreme misogyny is in itself a form of radicalisation. Last month a 19-year-old man was convicted of the murders of two sisters, [Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman](#), in north London. At his trial, it emerged that Danyal Hussein had been referred to Prevent in 2017 after using school computers to access far-right material.

He appeared in front of a Channel panel, the statutory body that assesses the risk posed by individuals, but was discharged a few months later with no continuing concerns in relation to extremism or terrorism. Yet Hussein would later draw up a “contract” with a “demon” in which he promised to kill six women – and only women – in six months in return for winning the lottery. He refused to give detectives his passwords, so it is impossible to confirm a suspicion that he may have accessed incel sites on the web. But in a note that echoes the incel obsession with not feeling sufficiently attractive to women, he pledged to “offer some blood” in exchange for making a girl fall in love with him.

All this demands a revolution in how we think about terrorism, domestic violence and misogyny. The Project Starlight report rightly includes a raft of recommendations, calling for much wider awareness of the link between violent extremism and a history of domestic violence. “All counter-terrorism case officers should consider checking for potential links to a domestic abuse-related incident,” it says.

But this may not be straightforward when so few incidents lead to convictions. A recent report revealed that three-quarters of domestic abuse cases reported to the police in England were closed without the perpetrator being charged. Some organisations have come up with welcome innovations – Croydon in south London, for instance, has a specialist social worker sitting on Channel panels, leading to the disclosure of previously unsuspected domestic abuse in the history of V2R referrals.

But the Cinderella status of crimes against women can no longer be tolerated. The connection between private and public violence is now crystal

clear – and the cost of continuing to ignore it is way too high.

- Joan Smith is the author of [Home Grown: How Domestic Violence Turns Men Into Terrorists](#) and co-chair of the mayor of London's Violence Against Women and Girls board
-

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Indonesia army signals end to ‘virginity test’ for female recruits

Human rights groups welcome chief of staff’s apparent decision to end the decades-long, ‘abusive’ practice



Women from the Indonesian army on parade. The chief of staff has indicated that the controversial ‘virginity test’ for recruits will end. Photograph: Hotli Simanjuntak/EPA

Women from the Indonesian army on parade. The chief of staff has indicated that the controversial ‘virginity test’ for recruits will end. Photograph: Hotli Simanjuntak/EPA

[Gemma Holliani Cahya](#) in Jakarta

Thu 5 Aug 2021 19.53 EDT

Human rights organisations have welcomed the Indonesian army's apparent decision to end the "abusive" and long-criticised "virginity testing" of female recruitments.

The procedure is known in Indonesia as "the two-finger test", because during the examination the doctors would insert two fingers inside the woman's vagina to check whether the hymen is still intact or not. Those declared not to be a virgin would be rejected for recruitment.

In a teleconference with military commanders across Indonesia, army chief of staff, Gen Andika Perkasa signalled the end of the decades-long practice and said that women would be recruited in the same way as men.

Recruits would be chosen on their ability to follow the army's education process, Gen Perkasa says in an excerpt from the teleconference uploaded to the Indonesian army [official YouTube account](#) on 18 July.

[Struggling for work and food, Indonesia's poorest suffer as Covid crisis deepens](#)

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"There will be no more [medical] examination outside that purpose," Perkasa said. "There are things that are not relevant ... And [we] can't do that kind of examination any more. We must do the same examination on the women recruits like we do on the men recruits."

The vaginal test was also in some cases carried out on the female fiancees of military officers.

Human Rights Watch said that the changes that Perkasa stated in the conference referred to the "abusive, unscientific, and discriminatory 'virginity test' that all branches of the Indonesian military have used for decades for female recruits".

It was reported that the Indonesian navy and air force would follow the army's lead. The Indonesian military has not responded to requests for comment.

Andreas Harsono, Indonesian researcher for Human Rights Watch, said the army was doing the right thing.

“It is now the responsibility of territorial and battalion commanders to follow orders, and recognise the unscientific, rights-abusing nature of this practice,” he said.

The end of the testing was welcomed by Indonesian women.

Anindi, who underwent the test 23 years ago as a hopeful 18-year-old naval recruit in Yogyakarta, recalled her devastation at being rejected after having the test despite scoring high marks in other tests.

“It will be a breakthrough if they end this test,” said Anindi, which is not her real name. “Even if it’s just for the army. Because it was a derogatory procedure for women.”

She said her father was in the navy and he dreamed that one of his children would follow in his footsteps. But Anindi, who was not a virgin, told the female doctor to stop when it was her turn to have the test.

[Indonesian women suffering 'epidemic' of domestic violence, activists warn](#)
[Read more](#)

“I did not want to be groped without my consent. So, I told her to stop and told her that I was not a virgin,” Anindi said. “I stopped her not because I was afraid she would find out that I was not a virgin, but because I felt uncomfortable with the procedure. That is the price for female recruits to enter the military; that trauma.”

HRW interviewed women from all over Indonesia who had been through the test, concluding that it was “a nationwide practice”. Harsono also said that they interviewed a woman who undertook the test in 1965.

“It means this unscientific, abusive, and discriminatory practice has been going on for more than five decades,” he said.

Alim Qibtiyah, a commissioner at the National Commission on Violence Against [Women](#) (Komnas Perempuan), said she was still waiting for the

policy switch to be made official but said it could mean more opportunities for women to join the military. Currently, only 10% of the country's 450,000-armed services personnel are women.

"It will open more opportunities for women," said Qibtiyah. "They will be confident and comfortable that they will be accepted because of their qualities. It's not fair that women were demanded to prove their morals [through the virginity test], while for the men recruits? How do you prove that?"

The World Health Organisation has stated that virginity testing is unscientific, harmful, and a violation of women's human rights that would bring immediate and long-term consequences that are detrimental to physical, psychological and social wellbeing of the women who took the test.

"The examination has no scientific merit or clinical indication – the appearance of a hymen is not a reliable indication of intercourse and there is no known examination that can prove a history of vaginal intercourse," the WHO stated in its report entitled Eliminating Virginity Testing published in 2018.

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[Science](#)

Recruiting women for cardiovascular research is harder, study finds

Women are reluctant to participate in trials despite being more likely to die of heart disease



Women perceive a higher risk of harm from taking part in medical trials than men. Photograph: David Davies/PA

Women perceive a higher risk of harm from taking part in medical trials than men. Photograph: David Davies/PA

Natalie Grover Science correspondent
[@NatalieGrover](https://twitter.com/NatalieGrover)

Fri 6 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

There are extra barriers to recruiting women for cardiovascular research, even though more women die of heart disease than men, a new study shows.

Despite agreement that it is crucial to have proportional representation of both sexes in medical research, a recent review of 740 completed cardiovascular clinical trials conducted between 2010 and 2017 found that women account for roughly [38% of the total participants](#).

One of the study's authors, Dr Jeske van Diemen, of Amsterdam University Medical Centre in the Netherlands, said changing this "is not as easy as it sounds".

It's still unclear as to why women participate less in areas like cardiovascular disease, so Van Diemen and her colleagues looked for evidence behind the motivators, facilitators and barriers to trial participation. They only found six studies (including a total of 846 men and 1,122 women) that fit their criteria, according to the paper published in the European Heart Journal.

The primary motivators for enrolment in trials were the possibility of better care, and the altruistic desire to promote science – while barriers such as time constraints and the potential for unfavourable outcomes were also highlighted by both sexes.

[Most biomedical studies fail to report if results differ by sex](#)

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However, women appeared to perceive a higher risk of harm from participation versus men, and also cited transport limitations as a reason for declining trial participation more often. It isn't clear why trial risk perceptions between the sexes differ, said Van Diemen, but "women more often have barriers which make it difficult to attend follow-up appointments, such as not holding a driving licence or caring for grandchildren".

Women only constituted 10% of clinical trial leadership committees in cardiovascular studies published in three medical journals, the authors said, suggesting that recruiting more diverse research teams and improving access

to trial sites could increase female participation. Including participants in trial design was also key, said Van Diemen.

Historically, clinical trials have favoured male subjects. A series of birth defects and other problems resulting from foetal exposure to certain drugs between the 1940s and 1970s prompted scientists to initially exclude women and their foetuses, and later women of childbearing age, from clinical drug research.

Women, with their fluctuating hormone levels, were also seen as confounding test subjects by researchers who generally believed that women and men would respond similarly to drugs. Caucasian males came to be considered the "norm" population. But women are not just small men. Their physiology is distinct – they have smaller kidneys and more fat tissue, for instance. Regulatory standards slowly shifted in favour of reincluding women in trials by the 1990s.

In many other areas of medical research, clinical trial recruitment is balanced in terms of sex, but the analysis of data by sex does not always occur – with sometimes damning outcomes.

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Oceans

Dead zones spread along Oregon coast and Gulf of Mexico, study shows

Agricultural runoff from farms and livestock operations creates oxygen-depleted areas inhospitable to animal and plant life



The rich ocean habitat in the Gulf of Mexico is threatened by dead zones caused by agricultural runoff. Photograph: AP

The rich ocean habitat in the Gulf of Mexico is threatened by dead zones caused by agricultural runoff. Photograph: AP

Katharine Gammon

Fri 6 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

Scientists recently surveyed the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico around Louisiana and Texas and what they discovered was a larger-than-average area of oxygen-depleted water – a “dead zone” where nothing can live.

National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists announced [their findings](#) this week: about 4m acres of habitat in

the Gulf are unusable for fish and bottom-dwelling species. The researchers had estimated a smaller dead zone this year, predicting an average-sized area.

“The distribution of the low dissolved oxygen was unusual this summer,” Nancy Rabalais, the professor at Louisiana State University who led the study, said in a statement. “The low oxygen conditions were very close to shore with many observations showing an almost complete lack of oxygen.”

But the Gulf isn’t the only coastal region experiencing dead zones this summer.

The waters off Oregon have had hypoxic areas every year since 2002. But this was a record year in Oregon as well: the dead zone emerged earlier this year than in the past [35 years](#).

Dead zones develop when fertilizers and nutrients from farmland drain into oceans or lakes, creating an algae bonanza that eventually dies and decomposes. As the algae decomposes, it depletes the waters of oxygen, suffocating species that live in the area.

Studies show that fish in hypoxic waters [change what they eat](#), which affects what people can catch. Dead zones also make commercially important species like shrimp [less available](#) in the Gulf and kills fish and crabs off the coast of the Pacific north-west.

The fertilizer pollution has caused an estimated \$2.4bn in damage to fisheries and marine habitat every year since 1980, the Union of Concerned Scientists said in a study released last summer.

In Oregon, the global climate crisis is making the problem worse: warmer waters hold less oxygen than cold waters, encouraging the growth of dead zones. In addition, as more carbon is absorbed into the oceans, the waters become more acidic – in turn making it harder for creatures like shellfish and crabs to grow their shells.

All this amounts to “a double whammy from the atmosphere and the ocean”, NOAA researcher Richard Feely told the Washington Post.

This year, crab fishers have described finding the carcasses of hundreds of Dungeness crabs along the shores of Washington and Oregon.

In 2001, a taskforce of state and federal agencies set a goal of keeping the dead zone's five-year average to no greater than 1,900 sq miles. This summer's dead zone is about three times larger than that. NOAA has also created a tool – the runoff risk forecast – to help farmers apply fertilizer at optimum times to ensure it stays on fields, with the hopes of limiting nutrient runoff to the Gulf.

Some say these actions don't go far enough. "Without a significant, concentrated effort to reduce nitrogen runoff from farms and livestock operations, Gulf Coast communities will continue to bear the costs of the dead zone," said Rebecca Boehm, an economist with the Union of Concerned Scientists food and environment program [in a statement](#).

"The dead zone has not meaningfully shrunk in the last 30 years, and we are no closer to the goals set by the Hypoxia Task Force. Policymakers need to rethink their strategy, or we will find ourselves back here next year with the same bad news."

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[New Zealand](#)

Google co-founder Larry Page is a New Zealand resident, government says

Billionaire's status was confirmed after report he had been granted entry to New Zealand during the pandemic despite closed borders



Google co-founder Larry Page is a New Zealand resident, the government has confirmed. Photograph: Elijah Nouvelage/Reuters

Google co-founder Larry Page is a New Zealand resident, the government has confirmed. Photograph: Elijah Nouvelage/Reuters

*Tess McClure in Christchurch
@tessairini*

Thu 5 Aug 2021 22.19 EDT

Billionaire and Google co-founder Larry Page is a [New Zealand](#) resident, and visited the country in the midst of Covid-19 border restrictions.

The government confirmed Page's residency after New Zealand outlet [Stuff broke the story on Thursday](#) that Page had been in the country earlier this year, accompanying his child who fell ill in Fiji.

Page, who is the sixth-richest man in the world, was granted entry into the country despite New Zealand borders remaining closed to most travellers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Residency alone would not grant Page access to New Zealand during Covid-19 border restrictions – the case was assessed as a health emergency, and a medical evacuation was approved.

So far, there is little detail about how or when Page was granted residency. In a statement, Nicola Hogg, general manager border and visa operations “Immigration New Zealand (INZ) can confirm [Larry Page](#) met relevant requirements to be approved entry to New Zealand.”

[Google co-founder Larry Page granted entry to New Zealand despite border closure, report says](#)

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Last month, [researchers designated the country](#) the “best place to survive global societal collapse,” citing its ability to protect borders and grow food for the population, temperate climate and low population density. Those attributes have made it a [favoured destination for global elites](#) hoping to buy boltholes or bunkers in preparation for a social or environmental apocalypse.

Billionaires acquiring residency or citizenship in New Zealand have been subject to political controversy in the past. In 2017, news broke that Peter Thiel, the billionaire co-founder of PayPal, was granted citizenship [despite spending only 12 days](#) in the country.

Politicians discussed Page's residency in parliament's question time on Thursday, with health minister Andrew Little saying the ministry had received a medevac request in January. He said that New Zealand conducted about 100 medevacs in any given year, and that “I'm advised all of the normal steps occurred in this case.”

Prime minister Jacinda Ardern was also asked by reporters about Page's presence in New Zealand, and said she had not been briefed on his visit. Ardern said the call was made by clinical staff, and should not be made by politicians. "With all [medevac] cases, those are decisions for clinicians, and I absolutely trust our clinicians to make decisions".

According to Immigration NZ, to be eligible for residence status in New Zealand via employment, most applicants must have been in New Zealand on a work to residence visa for two years, and meet health and character requirements.

Page may also have been eligible for a resident investor visa, which requires applicants to have \$10m to invest in New Zealand over a three-year period. In its information for investor visas, Immigration NZ said: "If you're granted residence you can come to New Zealand with your family and enjoy our unique lifestyle."

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El Paso: how one Texas city is beating the coronavirus



Mexican residents rode busses across the border during a binational Covid-19 vaccination program, in Tornillo, Texas. Photograph: José Luis González/Reuters

Mexican residents rode busses across the border during a binational Covid-19 vaccination program, in Tornillo, Texas. Photograph: José Luis González/Reuters

Huge outreach effort involving vaccines for Mexicans across the border has seen El Paso become one of America's most vaccinated cities

[Trisha Garcia in El Paso](#)

Fri 6 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

In a matter of just six minutes, a factory worker from a Mexican border city stepped off a bus in [Texas](#) last week, received the Covid-19 vaccine and was heading back home across the international bridge to Mexico.

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The vaccination took place near El Paso, the west Texas city where the coronavirus was raging so relentlessly nine months ago that jail inmates were being [used to load bodies](#) into mobile morgues because funeral homes were overflowing.

After a hard pandemic and with concerns over continued infections in Texas and northern Mexico, vaccination efforts are being stepped up.

El Paso now has one of the highest vaccination rates among US cities, according to government data – progress which prompted outreach across the border and [an international initiative](#).

As of 2 August, 69.7% of El Paso's population aged 12 and up were fully vaccinated and 81.4% were partially vaccinated.

“To go from one of the top Covid-19 infected cities in the nation last fall, to fifth among all cities in the country [for vaccinations] ... is nothing short of phenomenal,” El Paso’s Democratic mayor, Oscar Leeser, said last month. “This demonstrates once more the incredible spirit of our community.”

In one outreach effort, El Paso county judge Ricardo Samaniego launched a program to vaccinate workers from the many maquiladoras – or factories – in Juarez, El Paso’s [Mexican sister city](#), where hundreds of thousands toil for US-owned companies with operations there.

Lines of coaches came trundling across the border throughout July, bringing Mexican workers and their families to the US to get vaccinated at a specially designated site at the Tornillo port of US entry, just east of El Paso.

Up to 50,000 one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccines were requested, and supplies were channelled through the Texas department of health and human

services. That brand was chosen so that visitors could avoid a second trip.

Many people on both sides of the border are eager to see people's health protected but also to see the international boundary reopened for non-essential travel, because pandemic restrictions continue to stifle the normal bustle of commerce between El Paso and Juarez.

Texan Yuriko Ibarra received her vaccination some time ago – as a healthcare worker she was one of the first groups eligible. Her brother and sister-in-law, who live in Juarez and work for a US company, had to wait longer, but recently received the shot through the maquiladoras program.

"They asked me a lot about vaccination and of course I motivated them to do it," Ibarra said, adding: "They had a little fever and fatigue, a little sore arm, but nothing more."

During Covid surges, maquiladora industry workers were among the hardest hit in Juarez.

"Right now, they feel safer," Ibarra said of her relatives. "But they continue to take care of themselves, the use of masks and [hand sanitizer] remains the same, without going out so much, only for necessary things."

While many workers flocked to the vaccination site, others resisted vaccination, so registration was opened to the general public in Mexico. People could call to sign up for a spot on a bus to Tornillo.

"We were one of the worst [counties] in the country – then when the numbers [of infections] went down, we couldn't get people to [take a] test," Samaniego said. He went on: "Same thing is happening with the vaccine."

Although the situation in El Paso county is much better than at the height of the pandemic, the border remains closed to non-essential travel, although Samaniego had hoped that initiatives like his would raise the vaccination rate to the point where reopening would be possible.

"We don't know what levels they're looking for," Samaniego said of the federal authorities. "But we're doing everything we can to [try to achieve]

herd immunity.”

On Monday the Biden administration extended the controversial Trump-era Title 42 policy that allows the authorities to summarily expel undocumented migrants arriving in the US, in an attempt to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in holding facilities.

Meanwhile, the Maquiladora Index Association, a workers organization in Mexico, paid for the employees and their families to come to the American vaccination site in El Paso county, while the US government funded the vaccine, equipment and personnel on the US side.

Fabiola Luna Avila, Index president, told Mexican media outlets last week that most of the employees in the factory sector in the region have now been vaccinated.

Coronavirus cases are increasing again in El Paso, a pattern that is repeating reaping across the United States.

But, as elsewhere, the county judge explained that the vast majority of positive cases in the area were coming from one population: unvaccinated El Pasoans.

“That tells you the story of how powerful the vaccine is,” Samaniego said.

The maquiladora vaccination program wrapped up on 30 July, with almost 30,000 shots administered.

“It’s incredible,” Samaniego said on the final day. “We were worried about the hesitancy, but when you say it’s the last day, now buses are lining up.”

Last minute vaccinations started at 8.30am and in just three hours more than 2,000 doses had been administered.

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