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Data predicts 2m UK summer Covid cases with 10m isolating

Guardian analysis prompts health warnings as Javid says England entering ‘uncharted territory’

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Sajid Javid announced that anyone who has been double-vaccinated in England will not have to isolate after coming into contact with a confirmed Covid case from 16 August. Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Sajid Javid announced that anyone who has been double-vaccinated in England will not have to isolate after coming into contact with a confirmed Covid case from 16 August. Photograph: House of Commons/PA

[Peter Walker](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 15.20 EDT

Two million people could contract Covid this summer, potentially meaning up to 10 million must isolate in just six weeks, Guardian analysis shows, prompting warnings over risks to health and disruption to the economy.

The figures come as Sajid Javid, the health secretary, said England was entering “uncharted territory” in its wholesale scrapping of lockdown rules from 19 July. New infections could easily [rise above 100,000 a day](#) over the summer, he said, more than at any point in the pandemic.

Q&A

Covid cases by numbers

Show

28,773: current daily UK infection rate

50,000: government estimate of daily infection numbers by 19 July

100,000: Sajid Javid’s estimate of possible daily cases this summer

5,000: Labour estimate of number of daily long Covid cases if this happens

81,513: highest-ever UK one-day infection total (29 December 2020)

2 million: possible total number of new infections by mid-August

10 million: estimate of people told to isolate before system changes on 16 August

12 million: number of people in England likely not to have been double vaccinated by mid-August

60%: proportion of hospitality workers aged 16 to 34

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Javid announced that anyone who has been double-vaccinated [will not have to isolate](#) after coming into contact with a confirmed Covid case from 16 August, with under-18s also exempt. The rule for adults applies at least 10 days after their second dose. Anyone who has caught Covid must still isolate by law.

The Guardian understands ministers were warned that waiving the requirement for contacts to isolate immediately on 19 July would result in cases being up to 25% higher than if waiting another four weeks to do so.

But the decision to wait before dropping the self-isolation rule, combined with soaring cases amid further unlocking, has triggered growing concerns over the toll of long Covid and potential chaos for businesses forced to close because of staff absences.

A decision on travel rules is set to be made on Thursday, with ministers reportedly favouring a policy that would take effect before August to waive quarantine rules for double-vaccinated passengers from amber-list countries to [England](#).

UK Hospitality called for extra measures to protect a sector where 60% of workers are 16 to 34 years old – meaning many will not have been double-vaccinated by mid-August. Demands for self-isolation were causing “carnage” even at existing infection rates, the trade body said.

Ministers accept a rise in cases is inevitable as the country unlocks but argue the pace of vaccination means it will not be accompanied by significant hospitalisations or deaths. The latest official data however, shows the number of people who are in hospital with Covid has increased by 38% in the past week to 1,988 – the fastest rate of increase since last October.

Downing Street also regards a summer reopening as potentially less risky than delaying until the autumn when it could coincide with unvaccinated children returning to the classroom, and seasonal flu.

Speaking in the House of Commons on Tuesday, Javid said he was “very up front” about the trajectory for infections. “This pandemic is far from over and we will continue to proceed with caution. But we are increasingly confident that our plan is working, and that we can soon begin a new chapter, based on the foundations of personal responsibility and common sense rather than the blunt instrument of rules and regulations,” he said.

Coronavirus infections are currently running at just under 29,000 a day UK-wide, and the health secretary told MPs that modelling suggested the figure could reach 50,000 a day by 19 July and then 100,000 a day later in the summer.

This would not overwhelm the health service, Javid said, because the vaccination programme had become a “wall” against mass severe illness and deaths: “Jab by jab, brick by brick, we have been building a defence against this virus.”

But 100,000 cases a day would be unprecedented during the pandemic in the UK, which hit a daily peak of just over 81,000 in late December.

While projections about the rise in cases vary considerably, even a relatively conservative estimate – a daily average of 35,000 cases a day from now till 19 July, and an average of 60,000 from then until 16 August – would give a total above 2 million.

Currently, NHS test and trace contacts an average of 3.2 people for each confirmed case, but amid the more widespread social mixing of last summer it was closer to five, giving a potentially affected pool exceeding 10 million people. By law, until 16 August, all those coming into contact with a Covid case have to [isolate for 10 days after exposure](#).

The level of expected disruption will raise fears of reduced compliance with self-isolation rules, including people ceasing to use the [NHS Covid-19 app](#).

While Labour has supported the general principle of reopening, it was seeking more mitigation measures such as continued mandatory mask use in crowded indoor spaces, and has warned about the impact of high case rates beyond death figures.

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, said the forecast 100,000-a-day infection level would cause about 5,000 long Covid cases a day and more delays to NHS treatment as hospitals admitted coronavirus patients.

He said: “As more people are exposed to the virus more people will be forced to isolate themselves and yet ministers still refuse to fix sick pay support. The government’s strategy now relies on a combination of vaccination and natural infection amongst younger people.”

The end to quarantine measures for most contacts of Covid cases – those who have tested positive will still need to self-isolate – is in part an effort to prevent the economy from seizing up amid the rise in infections, as well as limiting the impact on education. Figures on Tuesday showed [641,000 children in England were absent from school last week](#) due to Covid.

But while ministers have pledged to offer at least a first vaccination to all adults by the end of July, at current rates of progress there could be about 12 million people in England still awaiting their second jab by 16 August.

Kate Nicholls, chief executive of UK Hospitality, said: “Today’s announcement doesn’t go far enough, quickly enough. The sector is experiencing severe staff shortages, compounded massively by the absence of team members who have been told to isolate despite not having shared shifts with colleagues who tested positive.

“Introducing a test to release system for fully vaccinated people from the middle of next month not only fails to recognise the carnage the current system is causing hospitality and the wider economy, but also significantly discriminates against a huge proportion of our workforce.

“With cases predicted to continue to rise, this means that hospitality’s recovery after 16 months of lockdown and severely disrupted trading will be harmed. Operators will be forced into reducing their operating hours or closing venues completely.”

Munira Wilson, the Liberal Democrat health spokesperson, said younger people “will bear the brunt” of what she called a government “hellbent on ditching all restrictions in one go”. She said: “After all the pain young

people have gone through, from the exam results fiasco last summer to job losses in the hospitality sector, this will feel like a bitter blow after being promised a so-called freedom day.”

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Why ministers stuck to 19 July for lifting England's Covid rules

Analysis: a further delay in a bid to contain the rapid rise in the infection rate would present its own problems

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Sajid Javid, the new health secretary, is understood to have more libertarian leanings than his predecessor, Matt Hancock. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Sajid Javid, the new health secretary, is understood to have more libertarian leanings than his predecessor, Matt Hancock. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Tue 6 Jul 2021 16.48 EDT

“Freedom is in our sights once again!” Sajid Javid told Conservative MPs on Tuesday, as he announced that double-jabbed people will not be required to quarantine from [16 August](#) if they come in contact with a Covid sufferer.

That mid-August date was the one concession to caution in a package of measures for “freedom day” that was more liberal than many at Westminster had expected, and has led Labour to accuse the government of being reckless.

Ministers willingly acknowledge that the approach they are taking, of lifting all restrictions at once, is a gamble, which might [cause cases to surge](#) – but they maintain that now is the moment to act.

“Whenever you unlock, there’s a third wave, right?” said one senior Conservative. Given what they regard as the political impossibility of leaving restrictions in place in the long term, the judgment became about which date was the least risky.

The 21 June moment initially set for step four of the roadmap in February was rejected, to give the NHS a chance to push up vaccination rates. But [by 19 July](#), the government expects two-thirds of adults to have received both doses.

With most schools breaking up in the week of 19 July, that date also coincides with the “firebreak”, when school-age children, who remain unvaccinated, are away from their classmates for six weeks.

The government fears that if it pushes the reopening later, the resulting sharp increase in cases would start to crash into the usual autumn/winter increase in seasonal flu. Cooler weather and indoor socialising also make happy hunting grounds for the virus. “We know Covid loves winter,” as one government source put it.

So ultimately the “quad” of senior ministers opted to press ahead with 19 July. Perhaps more controversially, they opted for a full-blooded version of “freedom day” that will ditch almost all restrictions.

The outlines of the package announced on Monday were broadly agreed at a meeting of the quad – Javid, Johnson, Rishi Sunak and Michael Gove – on Thursday, according to government sources, with key details including how and when the schools policy would be announced ironed out on Sunday.

The go-ahead was then given by the Covid-O cabinet subcommittee on Monday, before the wider cabinet was consulted.

Modelling presented to ministers before the decisions suggested that although infections could reach an unprecedented 100,000 a day, hospitalisations were likely to peak at a level lower than during the January wave.

However, though Chris Whitty and Patrick Vallance ultimately agreed that reopening should go ahead, both have warned that contingency plans must be made for the autumn.

Several senior Tories suggested the presence of the more libertarian Javid around the table, instead of Matt Hancock, was likely to have tipped the balance towards a bolder approach.

Downing Street insists that his presence was not the deciding factor, pointing out that Boris Johnson has been insisting since before Hancock's humiliation that the 19 July date would be a "terminus".

But one government source conceded that "having the health secretary as cover definitely made a difference". Another senior Conservative who knows the players well said it was evident that the decision had been reached without "the counterbalance of Matt".

[With Johnson driving, it doesn't feel like we've reached the end of the Covid line | Marina Hyde](#)

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The prime minister's former adviser Dominic Cummings has repeatedly portrayed Johnson as anti-restrictions, and Conservative MPs have been increasingly vocal in calling for the public to be given the freedoms they were promised vaccination would bring.

Javid's arrival appears to have cemented that view. The health secretary is such a fan of *The Fountainhead*, the libertarian fable by the American author and philosopher Ayn Rand, made into a 1949 film starring Gary Cooper, that he once confessed to reading the courtroom scene aloud to his future wife.

In it, the character played by Cooper in the film, Howard Roark, forcefully defends the right of individuals to make their own decisions, rather than be subordinated to "the collective".

Javid's aides insist he is motivated not by ideology, but a hard-nosed assessment of the costs of continuing restrictions, not just for the economy but for the [NHS](#), which has built up a huge backlog of non-Covid work. And ministers appear to have taken the view, "If not now, then when?"

But by ditching masks – which polls suggest the public would like to keep in some circumstances – throwing open nightclubs and giving the green light to standing six deep in crowded bars, some more cautious Tories believe the government is setting itself up for yet another embarrassing U-turn.

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640,000 children off school in England as Covid bubbles scrapped from 19 July

Education secretary sweeps away containment regime in England as absences due to coronavirus surge

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02:03

Gavin Williamson scraps Covid bubbles in schools from 19 July – video

Richard Adams Education editor

Tue 6 Jul 2021 19.04 EDT

More than 640,000 children in England were absent from school last week due to Covid, as the government announced its plans to sweep away the current system for containing Covid outbreaks within schools, colleges and nurseries.

In a statement to parliament, the education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#), said that from 19 July grouping pupils into protective bubbles within schools, colleges and nurseries in England would no longer be required, along with several other preventive measures, with the use of self-isolation for children with close contacts to end in mid-August.

“I do not think that it is acceptable that children should face greater restrictions, over and above those of wider society, especially since they have given up so much to keep older generations safe during this pandemic,” Williamson told MPs.

Kate Green, the shadow education secretary, accused Williamson of trying to “wish away” the challenges facing schools.

“Today’s statement offers no clarity on how the government will stop infections spiralling. The Conservatives’ inadequate testing regime, lack of action on ventilation and their recklessness at the border have put our children’s education at risk,” Green said.

Headteachers would also no longer have to trace contacts within schools, Williamson said, with responsibility being handed to NHS test and trace from 19 July.

The government’s latest guidance removes restrictions such as staggering school start and finish times, social distancing, and recommendations for the wearing of masks in classrooms, communal areas and school transport.

From 16 August those under 18 identified as close contacts will be advised to take a PCR test, and only need to isolate if they test positive or have symptoms of Covid. [Children](#) in early years education should only take a PCR test if a member of their household tests positive.

Secondary school pupils will still be required to take twice-weekly lateral flow tests for at least the first month of the new school year, as well as two on-site tests before the start of the term. But Williamson said the practice would be reviewed before the end of September.

Staff and pupils who test positive using a lateral flow test will need to isolate and take a PCR test. A negative result from a PCR test taken within two days will allow staff and pupils to immediately return to school.

Doing away with bubbles from 19 July means many schools will have just a few days before the end of the term, opening the way for end-of-year assemblies or events involving all pupils. But others will have already closed for the summer break.

01:56

Boris Johnson announces end to Covid restrictions on 19 July – video

Patrick Roach, the general secretary of the NASUWT teaching union, said schools needed clear guidance from the government to counter “conflicting

views” from parents over testing and safety. “Yet again, the government announcements risk more confusion at a time when there is a need for clarity and certainty,” Roach said.

Williamson also said there would be no restrictions on in-person teaching at universities in England from next term.

The announcement came as [figures from the Department for Education](#) (DfE) revealed a 66% increase in the number of pupils infected or self-isolating in the past week.

The number of schoolchildren with confirmed Covid infections jumped from 15,000 on 24 June to 28,000 on 1 July, while the number self-isolating because of suspected Covid contacts within school rose from 279,000 to 471,000 last week. Including contacts outside school, more than 560,000 children were self-isolating.

The latest DfE statistics showed that last week more than 5% of primary school teachers were absent for Covid-related reasons, while a further 4.5% were absent for other reasons – suggesting staffing levels may be behind the increase in school closures. Last week more than 18,000 students and pupils were off because their schools or colleges were closed due to Covid.

Unison, which represents many school support staff, said the government’s latest measures were alarming: “Safety measures like bubbles and self-isolation are proven to reduce the spread of the virus. With around one in 10 pupils reporting symptoms of long Covid weeks after infection, this is a dangerous gamble from the government.”

The DfE’s new guidance makes a brief mention of the need for better ventilation in classrooms, and says schools will need outbreak management plans to include “the possibility that in some local areas it may become necessary to reintroduce ‘bubbles’ for a temporary period”.

New research from the London School of Economics has found that pupils in England lost an average of 61 days of schooling between the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and April this year, fewer than those in Wales or Scotland.

Overall, pupils across the UK lost out on a third of their usual learning time, even taking into account learning at home. Pupils in Scotland lost 64 days, while those in Wales lost 66 days, partly because of different school closure policies but also because of different term times. Pupils in Northern Ireland lost 61 days.

Across the UK, poorer pupils lost more learning time than their wealthier classmates, but varying school closure policies meant that the most disadvantaged pupils in England lost less learning than the most affluent pupils elsewhere in the UK.

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Coronavirus

Covid cases could soon rise above 100,000 a day, Javid concedes

England will be entering ‘uncharted territory’ in its scrapping of restrictions, says health secretary

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00:56

Sajid Javid says England is in 'uncharted territory' with Covid unlocking – video

Peter Walker Political correspondent
[@peterwalker99](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 04.40 EDT

England will be entering “uncharted territory” in its wholesale scrapping of Covid lockdown rules and infection numbers could easily rise above 100,000 a day over the summer, the health secretary has said.

With Labour demanding that the widely expected reopening on 19 July is balanced with mitigation measures, Sajid Javid defended the [approach set out by Boris Johnson](#) on Monday evening, but acknowledged considerable uncertainty.

Notably, a week after saying there must be “no going back” from unlocking, Javid, who took over from Matt Hancock 10 days ago, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that some restrictions might have to be reimposed in the future.

Asked if this might happen, he said: “I hope not, and that’s certainly not in our plan.”

Adding that the reopening plans maintained some powers for local authorities to take action, Javid said it remained possible that new variants of Covid could emerge, potentially with resistance to current vaccines: “The one thing that no one can say for certain anywhere in the world is the future progression of the virus.”

Asked about government projections that infection rates were likely to reach 50,000 a day by 19 July, Javid accepted it was “fair to say” that even this figure could double or more. The highest daily infection rate for the UK thus far recorded was just over 81,000, seen in late December.

UK Covid cases

“Because this is uncharted territory for any country in the world, as you go further out, week by week, the projections are even less reliable,” he said. “As we ease and go into the summer, we expect them to rise. They could go as high as 100,000. We want to be very straightforward about this in what we can expect in terms of case numbers. But what matters more than anything is hospitalisation and death numbers.”

Questioned about what this could mean for hospitalisation rates, currently at about 300 admissions a day, Javid said the government had “a number of models that we look at internally” about how this could progress, but declined to give any projections.

Announcing [the plans](#) at a Downing Street press conference on Monday, Johnson warned the public against going “demob happy”, but said the time had come to lift virtually all rules, calling this a “move from a universal government diktat to relying on people’s personal responsibility”.

The prime minister said: “We must be honest with ourselves that if we can’t reopen our society in the next few weeks, when we will be helped by the arrival of summer and by the school holidays, we must ask ourselves: when will we be able to return to normal?”

Javid is due to address MPs on Tuesday lunchtime, when he is expected to announce an easing of self-isolation rules for people who have received two vaccination jabs who come into close contact with someone who tests positive.

“What I can say is, it makes sense because of the vaccines and the way they are working that people that are double vaccinated are treated differently to people who are not. And that’s what I’ll be saying in parliament,” he told Today.

Prof Neil Ferguson of Imperial College London, a government adviser, said the impact of the Covid vaccination programme meant the expected third wave “is going to look very different from the second wave”, when daily death rates were above 1,000 people.

“At the peak of the second wave 50,000 cases would translate into something like 500 deaths, but that’s going to be much lower this time, more like 50 or so,” he told Today.

“The challenge is, there’s still the potential of getting very large numbers of cases and so if we get very high numbers of cases a day, 150,000 or 200,000, it could still cause some pressure to the health system. This is a slight gamble, it’s a slight experiment at the moment, and I think it’s justifiable and I’m reasonably optimistic, but policy will have to remain flexible.”

One key area of contention is the plan to make all mask use voluntary, although transport providers such as airlines and train companies might be able to mandate it as a condition of travel.

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, said Labour wanted the economy to reopen “in a balanced way”, contrasting this with what he termed the planned “high-risk free-for-all”.

He told Today: “Yes, we need to reopen more, but we would maintain some mitigating precautions. We would maintain mask wearing on public transport and in shops, we would give support to premises to properly

ventilate and install air filtration systems. And we would pay people proper sick pay and isolation support.”

He added: “We understand why we want to get our economy reopened, we need to get our economy reopened, but why on earth would you throw all caution to the wind?”

Asked about his own future mask use, Javid told Today he would “carry a mask with me for the foreseeable future” and wear it in crowded and enclosed spaces. However, he said he would choose to not do so even if it was recommended if the space concerned was not crowded.

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A month after England unlocks on 19 July, double-jabbed people will not have to isolate after contact with Covid carriers. Photograph: seksan Mongkhonkhamsao/Getty Images

[Guardian morning briefing](#)

Wednesday briefing: England heads for ‘uncharted territory’

A month after England unlocks on 19 July, double-jabbed people will not have to isolate after contact with Covid carriers. Photograph: sekSAN Mongkhonkhamsao/Getty Images

Sajid Javid braces nation for scrapping of lockdown rules ... autism and radicalisation ... and have Southgate's men changed the way we see football?

by [Warren Murray](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.30 EDT

Top story: ‘Bubble’ system in schools to end

Hello, Warren Murray bringing you this morning’s first helping of stories.

Two million people could contract Covid-19 this summer, potentially meaning [up to 10 million must isolate](#) in just six weeks, Guardian analysis shows. Sajid Javid, the health secretary, said England was entering “uncharted territory” in its wholesale scrapping of lockdown rules from 19 July. New infections could easily [rise above 100,000 a day](#) over the summer, he said, more than at any point in the pandemic. Ministers accept a rise in cases is inevitable but argue the pace of vaccination means it will not be accompanied by significant hospitalisations or deaths.

Javid announced that anyone who has been double-vaccinated [will not have to isolate](#) after coming into contact with a confirmed Covid case from 16 August, with under-18s also exempt. Anyone who has caught Covid must still isolate by law. UK Hospitality has called for extra measures to protect a sector where 60% of workers are too young to have been double-vaccinated by mid-August. More than 640,000 children in England were absent from school last week due to Covid, it has emerged, as the government moves to [sweep away the “bubble” system](#) for containing Covid outbreaks within schools, colleges and nurseries.

02:03

Gavin Williamson scraps Covid bubbles in schools from 19 July – video

A decision on travel rules is set to be made on Thursday, with ministers reportedly favouring a policy that would take effect before August to waive quarantine rules for double-vaccinated passengers from amber-list countries to England. Heathrow is to provide [fast-track lanes for fully vaccinated arrivals](#) under a pilot programme to be launched this week. Passengers from selected destinations will be able to upload their coronavirus vaccination certificate before boarding.

Midweek catch-up

- > Eric Adams, a former police captain, has [won the Democratic primary for mayor of New York City](#) after promising to strike the right balance between fighting crime and ending racial injustice in policing.
 - > Steven Gallant, who fought the Fishmongers' Hall attacker with a [narwhal tusk and his own fists](#), has been told he can be freed from jail, having done 16 years for murder. Usman Khan killed two people during the London terror attack in November 2019.
 - > Britney Spears's court-appointed lawyer [has asked to resign](#) from the conservatorship that has overseen her life for 13 years. It comes after her court testimony prompted the resignation of her manager and a co-conservator.
 - > Danyal Hussein, 19, has been [convicted of murdering sisters Nicole Smallman, 27, and Bibaa Henry, 46](#), in a London park last year. Hussein had been through a government deradicalisation programme and was said to be fascinated by demons and the occult.
 - > The UK's climate targets will cost the government [less over the next 30 years than the price of battling the Covid pandemic](#) if it acts quickly, according to the UK's fiscal watchdog.
-

Autism and radicalisation – A “staggeringly high” number of people with autism are referred to the government’s anti-radicalisation Prevent programme, according to Jonathan Hall QC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. In a speech, Hall is to acknowledge “a very real and

respectable fear that making any sort of link will lead to stigma ... Is the use of strong powers to detect and investigate suspected terrorism in children justified? I believe it is because of the potential risk to the general public. But [is the criminal justice outcome the right one](#) in all cases?" Clare Hughes, criminal justice manager at the National Autistic Society, said: "The vast majority of the 700,000 autistic people in the UK are law-abiding" and called for sensitive, accurate and balanced" media reporting. Marking the 16th anniversary of the 7/7 terrorist attacks that killed 72 people, Hall will say the greatest risk remains an Islamist attack but the most dynamic new category is defined by investigators as mixed, unclear or uncertain (MUU) ideology, a category that does not prescribe to one specific doctrine.

Galaxy brain for big data – The UK has [booted up its most powerful supercomputer](#), which its creators hope will make the process of preventing, diagnosing and treating disease better, faster and cheaper. Cambridge-1, worth \$100m, capitalises on artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare. Its first projects will be to develop a deeper understanding of diseases such as dementia, design new drugs and improve the accuracy of finding disease-causing variations in human genomes.



The \$100m Cambridge-1 supercomputer. Photograph: Nvidia

The UK has the ingredients to take advantage of this computing ability because of its huge resources of data. As well as large structured datasets like the UK Biobank, it has access to a wide range of clinicians via the NHS. No such comparable infrastructure exists at such a size elsewhere, GSK's Dr Kim Branson said. "This is why GSK built an AI team and AI hubs in London and not in San Francisco, where I am."

'Fantastic' – A “deliciously fresh” pinot noir from Monmouthshire has become the [first Welsh vintage to scoop a gold medal](#) in the Decanter World Wine Awards. Robb Merchant, a former Royal Mail worker who runs White Castle vineyard with his wife, Nicola, a retired nurse, described the win as “fantastic” for the vineyard, which had been his “wife’s dream” to establish. Their drop costs £25.50 a bottle.



Robb and Nicola Merchant. Photograph: White Castle Vineyard

While some wine drinkers may be unfamiliar with Welsh wine, it is not new, with the Scottish industrialist Lord Bute credited with planting the first commercial vineyard at Castell, north of Cardiff, in 1875. Today there are 31 vineyards growing more than 20 different grape varieties, and many wine trails aimed at tourists.

Today in Focus podcast: What if England win Euro 2020?

After decades of disappointment, Gareth Southgate's England team stand on the brink of making their first major final since 1966 – and from taking the knee to helping hungry children, they've got much more than football on their plate. Max Rushden explores what it would mean if the nice guys could [finish first at last](#).

Today in Focus

What if England win Euro 2020?

00:00:00

00:28:07

Lunchtime read: Unlock and let the third wave in

Lifting the final Covid restrictions in England on 19 July is a gamble for the government. Even without further easing, cases are on course to surpass 50,000 a day by mid-July and could hit 100,000 or more. What the next wave means for lives and the NHS is still deeply uncertain – but the science offers some clues. [Ian Sample examines the risks](#).



Illustration: Guardian Design/Getty/Shutterstock

Sport

[Gareth Southgate is confident England will show no fear](#) in their Euro 2020 semi-final against Denmark. He has urged his side to create an iconic Wembley moment by reaching a tournament final for the first time since the 1966 World Cup. In the end, it all came down to one kick [to put Italy into the Euro 2020 final](#). One kick to erase the years of underachievement, one kick to quench a nation's longing, one kick for everything.

It took a dominant performance under the Centre Court roof as [Aryna Sabalenka defeated Ons Jabeur 6-4, 6-3](#) to reach her first semi-final at Wimbledon. Emma Raducanu [has said she had to pull out of Wimbledon](#) because the “whole experience caught up with me”, as Judy Murray hit out at “middle-aged men commenting on the mental wellbeing of teenage girls”. [Angelique Kerber’s 6-2, 6-3 win over the Czech, Karolina Muchova](#), has put her through to the last four at Wimbledon, where she will take on the current No 1, Ashleigh Barty.

The British & Irish Lions tour of South Africa [has been plunged further into disarray](#) after the match against the Bulls on Saturday was postponed and the Springboks were hit with another 11 Covid cases – including the head coach,

Jacques Nienaber – raising more fears over the Test series. [Banned sprinter Sha'Carri Richardson was not on the Olympic roster](#) released Tuesday by USA Track and Field, a decision that means the American champion's positive test for marijuana will cost her a chance at running on the relay team in Tokyo, in addition to her spot in the 100m individual race.

Business

The hack of the US tech firm Kaseya, which is already being called “the biggest ransomware attack on record”, has affected hundreds of businesses globally, including supermarkets in Sweden and schools in New Zealand. But [what was behind it and why is it dangerous?](#) The FTSE100 is set to lift 0.25% this morning and if you're lucky enough to be going on holiday soon, the pound will buy you \$1.380 and €1.167.

The papers

Responses to the government's decision to lift restrictions but maintain self-isolation rules until 16 August received coverage on most of the nation's front pages, with the **Guardian** reporting that data indicates [up to two million people could contract Covid this summer](#) – meaning up to 10 million could have to self-isolate. Health secretary Sajid Javid warned on Tuesday that England's new infections could [soon rise above 100,000 a day](#), more than at any point in the pandemic.



The Guardian's front page, Wednesday 7 July 2021

The **i** has a scoop this morning, citing an unnamed Whitehall source saying that “masks were scrapped for the economy”. The “driving force to scrap mandatory face coverings came from modelling that showed events and hospitality industries could lose more than £4bn”.

The **FT** warns that businesses face staffing “carnage” as a result of increasing infections and the resultant isolation of workers, the **Telegraph** reports on the “backlash” against the isolation rules, which it says “slam brakes on freedom”, and the **Daily Mail** calls the continuing isolation requirement – announced yesterday by Javid – “insanity”. **Metro** and the **Mirror** both lead on England’s Eurozone match tonight with the headlines “Beer we go” and “Bring it home, lads” respectively.

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Euro 2020

Gareth Southgate urges England to show no fear and build Wembley history



Gareth Southgate: ‘Wembley has a fantastic history but a lot of those memories are from the old stadium.’ Composite: Guardian Design

Gareth Southgate: ‘Wembley has a fantastic history but a lot of those memories are from the old stadium.’ Composite: Guardian Design

- ‘Our players have created really special memories’
- Manager may opt for Bukayo Saka over Jadon Sancho

[Jacob Steinberg](#)

[@JacobSteinberg](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 17.30 EDT

Gareth Southgate is confident England will show no fear in their Euro 2020 semi-final against Denmark. He has urged his side to create an iconic Wembley moment by reaching a tournament final for the first time since the 1966 World Cup.

England will be out to make history when they face [Denmark](#) in front of 66,000 supporters on Wednesday night and the size of the occasion is not lost on their manager.

[Harry Kane ready to help England move on from all those oh-so-nears | Nick Ames](#)

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Southgate, who has received messages of support from past teammates and managers, spoke with pride about his players changing the narrative around the national team and he wants them to give the fans special memories of Wembley, pointing out the stadium has lacked era-defining moments since reopening in 2007.

“Wembley has a fantastic history but a lot of those memories would be from the old stadium,” Southgate said. “I don’t expect Denmark to come being fearful of Wembley. They’ve got experienced players and they’ll enjoy playing there but we’ve got to make the game one that they don’t enjoy.

“The history of the stadium relies on those iconic moments. There have been less of those headline events at the new Wembley, whereas this tournament

is one of those moments where we've had the chance to have some very high-profile games already and achieve some big moments.

“There’s some sort of pictures on the wall as you drive into the dressing rooms of iconic [England](#) moments but some of them aren’t even from finals. [David] Beckham’s free-kick against Greece was a qualifier. Our players over the last two tournaments, they’ve been able to create some really special memories, especially for youngsters. Bless them, they think it’s like this all the time with [England](#).”



Gareth Southgate leads England training at St George's Park. Photograph: Carl Recine/Reuters

Southgate, who could replace Jadon Sancho with Bukayo Saka on the right flank, believes England will play with freedom as they try to reach their first [European Championship](#) final. He saw his young side hold their nerve against Germany in the last 16 and he expects another composed display against Denmark.

“I’ve not heard the new Wembley have an atmosphere like it did for the Germany game,” Southgate said. “I’m sure tomorrow is going to be very special. They know that this is a great chance to be the first team to get to a [Euros] final. But they’re excited by it. I don’t think they’re inhibited by it.

Bukayo Saka

“For them it’s just the next of a number of big games. I’m not worried about the occasion, we had that with the opening game [against Croatia] and we dealt with that. We had that with the Germany game and we dealt with that. I’ve got total trust in them.”

England have improved since losing their World Cup semi-final against Croatia three years ago and Southgate said he felt lucky to be in a position to end the country’s long history of falling short.

“We’ve spoken a lot about the legacy and the players who have gone before us,” he said. “They had the same level of passion as these players have for playing for their country and we’ve learned a lot from their near-misses.”

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- Turn on sport notifications.

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Southgate stressed that Denmark, spurred on by emotion since Christian Eriksen’s cardiac arrest, would be dangerous opponents. England struggled against Denmark in the Nations League last autumn, drawing 0-0 in Copenhagen before losing 1-0 at Wembley, and Southgate found himself under pressure.

“The autumn was a very difficult period for us,” he said. “I’d say it was the start of a period [when] I felt a high level of criticism and judgment that has existed really until the last game or so. It was a definite shift in how we were viewed. It was the first time I’d experienced that since Russia. That was a very good learning process.”

[England’s next challenge: turn tense Wembley relationship into love match](#)
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Southgate brushed off the criticism and the mood is far more positive now. “I knew when I took the job what it was. I was a kid watching Sir Bobby [Robson] and Graham Taylor. I played for Terry [Venables], for Glenn [Hoddle], for Sven[-Göran Eriksson], for Kevin [Keegan].

“I just think we were in an interesting period: midway through the pandemic, no fans in the stadiums. I can’t say I enjoyed the autumn matches at all. The Covid restrictions on the camps were really inhibiting, with lads not able to sit and chat. So much of what we are about as a team is this social part and this connection with each other.

“It was a miserable experience for players. We’re asking players to perform freely on the pitch when every other part of their life was totally restricted. It’s been a joy to be in a bubble now where we’ve been able to sit outside all the time. We’ve had the freedom in the camp. It’s made a massive difference to how we’ve been able to work.”

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Food & drink industry

Welsh red: ex-postal worker and retired nurse grab gold with a pinot noir

Monmouthshire's White Castle Vineyard scoops top prize against global rivals in prestigious blind tasting award



The White Castle vineyard in Llanvetherine, near Abergavenny, Wales.
Photograph: White Castle Vineyard LTD

The White Castle vineyard in Llanvetherine, near Abergavenny, Wales.
Photograph: White Castle Vineyard LTD

Zoe Wood

@zoewoodguardian

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.01 EDT

First it was English winemakers that had vineyards in traditional wine-making regions such as France looking over their shoulder, now it is Wales, after a “deliciously fresh” pinot noir from Monmouthshire scooped a prestigious wine award.

[White Castle Vineyard's](#) “pinot noir reserve 2018”, a red wine that costs £25.50 a bottle, has become the first Welsh vintage to win a gold medal in the Decanter World Wine Awards (DWWA).

Robb Merchant, a former Royal Mail worker who runs White Castle with his wife, Nicola, a retired nurse, described the win as “fantastic” for the vineyard which had been his “wife’s dream” to establish.



Robb and Nicola Merchant. Photograph: White Castle Vineyard Ltd

“This is the biggest prize we have ever won,” he said. “This is the first time we have entered the Decanter awards. It is judged blind so, for us, this win really underpins what we have been striving to do in terms of quality.”

The couple bought a field next to their smallholding in 2008 and planted 4,000 vines the following year. It has since expanded to 7,000 vines and produces 10,000 bottles a year.

The pinot noir is described as “deliciously fresh” by the DWWA co-chair Sarah Jane Evans. “It has got a lovely cherry red fruit character. It’s a really elegant, fresh wine. It’s delicious and the fact it comes from Wales is a bonus.”

The competition awarded 635 gold medals, with judges tasting more than 18,000 wines from 56 countries. Gold medals were hard won, said Evans, as winning wines had to “stand up on their own two feet” against competition from all over the world.

“We’re used to the UK making white wines but what is interesting is they have made a red wine, which people have always said with the UK climate was impossible,” added Evans.

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English winemakers have won widespread recognition in recent years, particularly for the quality of their sparkling wines, and their haul from this year’s DWWA included Kent producer Squerryes winning one of just 50 “best in show” medals.

While some wine drinkers may be unfamiliar with Welsh wine it is not new, with the Scottish industrialist Lord Bute credited with planting the first commercial vineyard at Castell Coch, north of Cardiff, in 1875. Today there are 31 vineyards growing more than 20 different grape varieties, and many wine trails aimed at tourists.

Marchant said the couple planned to build on their success by continuing to expand White Castle and urged people to experiment with Welsh wine: “Try it. Go and visit the vineyards and taste the wines because you’ll taste some exceptional wines.”

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Donald Trump

Trump told chief of staff Hitler ‘did a lot of good things’, book says

- Remark shocked John Kelly, author Michael Bender reports
- Book details former president’s ‘stunning disregard for history’



John Kelly listens as Donald Trump talks to the media beside Air Force One.
Photograph: Carlos Barria/Reuters

John Kelly listens as Donald Trump talks to the media beside Air Force One.
Photograph: Carlos Barria/Reuters

[Martin Pengelly](#) in Washington

[@MartinPengelly](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

On a visit to Europe to mark the 100th anniversary of the end of the first world war, [Donald Trump](#) insisted to his then chief of staff, John Kelly: “Well, Hitler did a lot of good things.”

[Nightmare Scenario review: Trump, Covid and a lasting national trauma](#)

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The remark from the former US president on the 2018 trip, which reportedly “stunned” Kelly, a retired US Marine Corps general, is reported in a new book by Michael Bender of the Wall Street Journal.

Frankly, We Did Win This Election has been [widely trailed](#) ahead of publication next week. The Guardian obtained a copy.

Bender reports that Trump made the remark during an impromptu history lesson in which Kelly “reminded the president which countries were on which side during the conflict” and “connected the dots from the first world war to the second world war and all of Hitler’s atrocities”.

Bender is one of a number of authors to have interviewed Trump since he was ejected from power.

He reports that Trump denied making the remark about Hitler.

But Bender says unnamed sources reported that Kelly “told the president that he was wrong, but Trump was undeterred”, emphasizing German economic recovery under Hitler during the 1930s.

“Kelly pushed back again,” Bender writes, “and argued that the German people would have been better off poor than subjected to the Nazi genocide.”

Bender adds that Kelly told Trump that even if his claim about the German economy under the Nazis after 1933 were true, “you cannot ever say anything supportive of [Adolf Hitler](#). You just can’t.”

Trump ran into considerable trouble on the centennial trip to Europe, even beyond his usual conflicts with other world leaders.

A decision to [cancel a visit](#) to an American cemetery proved controversial. Trump was later [reported](#) to have called American soldiers who died in the war “losers” and “suckers”.

Kelly, whose son was [killed in Afghanistan in 2010](#), left the White House in early 2019. He has spoken critically of Trump since, reportedly [telling](#) friends the president he served was “the most flawed person I have ever met in my life”.

Bender writes that Kelly did his best to overcome Trump’s “stunning disregard for history”.

“Senior officials described his understanding of slavery, Jim Crow, or the Black experience in general post-civil war as vague to nonexistent,” he writes. “But Trump’s indifference to Black history was similar to his disregard for the history of any race, religion or creed.”

[Hillbilly Elegy author JD Vance sorry for since-deleted anti-Trump tweets](#)
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Concern over the rise of the far right in the US grew during Trump’s time in power and continues, as he maintains a grip on a Republican party determined to obstruct investigations of the deadly 6 January assault on the US Capitol by supporters seeking to overturn his election defeat.

Trump has made positive remarks about far-right and white supremacist groups.

During a presidential debate in 2020, Trump was asked if he would denounce white supremacists and militia groups. He [struggled](#) with the answer and eventually told the far-right Proud Boys group to “stand back and stand by”.

In 2017, in the aftermath of a neo-Nazi march in Virginia which earned supportive remarks from Trump, the German magazine Stern [used](#) on its cover an illustration of Trump giving a Nazi salute while wrapped in the US flag. Its headline: “Sein kampf” – his struggle.

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[Greensill](#)

Greensill given access to Covid loans without detailed checks, watchdog reveals

Taxpayer facing potential £335m loss after audit office says government bank carried out limited due diligence on business support loans



Lex Greensill, whose company's accreditation attracted BEIS interest.
Photograph: Ian Tuttle/REX/Shutterstock

Lex Greensill, whose company's accreditation attracted BEIS interest.
Photograph: Ian Tuttle/REX/Shutterstock

Rajeev Syal

Tue 6 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

The collapsed finance firm [Greensill](#) Capital was given access to a government-backed loan scheme without being subjected to detailed checks, leaving UK taxpayers facing a £335m loss, Whitehall's spending watchdog has found.

The National Audit Office said the government-owned British Business Bank [BBB] carried out limited due diligence on the firm's application before giving permission to access the [Coronavirus](#) Large Business Interruption Loans Scheme (CLBILS).

In a report released on Wednesday, bank officials said they were also subjected to “unusual” levels of interest from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy [BEIS] during the accreditation process, as ministers hoped that Greensill’s loans could halt the collapse of Sanjeev Gupta’s steel empire.

The bank stopped Greensill’s access to the loan scheme after discovering that six of the seven loans handed out by Greensill Capital went to Gupta’s firms on the same day, the report revealed.

Greensill Capital collapsed into administration in March, putting thousands of jobs at risk and triggering an international political and financial scandal.

The supply chain finance firm is the focus of a Whitehall inquiry after it emerged that its adviser and shareholder, the former prime minister David Cameron, lobbied current ministers including the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, for access to another government-backed loan scheme.

Auditors examined the bank’s decision to allow Greensill to access business support schemes, which were set up to give struggling firms swift access to financial assistance during the Covid-19 crisis.

Quick Guide

What is the Greensill lobbying scandal?

Show

What is Greensill Capital?

Set up by the Australian financier Lex Greensill, the firm specialises in supply-chain finance, which settles business bills immediately for a fee, assisting with the issue of late payments. Greensill began working with the

NHS as part of Citibank in 2012, but then set up his own firm. This [collapsed](#) in March.

How is David Cameron involved and what did he do?

Cameron was prime minister when [Greensill](#) started to seek government work, although the Australian was reportedly first brought in by Jeremy Heywood, who was cabinet secretary at the time. But in 2016, after leaving office, Cameron became an adviser to [Greensill](#) Capital. He was given share options reportedly worth tens of millions of pounds.

Last year he sent “multiple” texts to Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, and “informally” phoned two other Treasury ministers, asking for Greensill Capital to get the largest possible allocation of [government-backed loans](#) under the Covid corporate financing facility, or CCFF. He also lobbied a No 10 aide, and in 2019 took Greensill [to a “private drink”](#) with Matt Hancock, the health secretary.

What was the government response?

Text replies from Sunak in 2019, released after a freedom of information request, show that in April last year [the chancellor told Cameron](#) he had “pushed the team” in the Treasury to see if he could arrange full access to CCFF loans. Other released documents show Treasury officials had a series of meetings with Greensill Capital but eventually refused it access to the CCFF. The company was later accredited to the coronavirus large business interruption loan scheme (CLBILS), handing it the ability to offer government-backed loans of up to £50m.

What else happened?

Greensill became so embedded within Cameron’s Downing Street; he had [a No 10 business card](#) calling him a “senior adviser” and was nominated by Haywood for a CBE.

The government’s chief commercial officer, Bill Crothers, began working as an adviser to Greensill Capital in 2015 – while still employed in the civil service. Remarkably, he was given official approval to do this. Boris

Johnson has declined to rule out the possibility that more officials could have been connected to the company.

What are the concerns?

There are questions over why the government, which does not have cashflow problems, needed to use supply chain finance.

Cameron's role is under particular scrutiny. He appears to have used personal contacts to seek preferential treatment for a company in which he had a financial stake.

Sunak's pledge that he had "pushed the team" to help also raised eyebrows.

Finally, the dual role of Crothers has prompted new worries about a revolving door between Whitehall and private companies that then benefit from government contracts.

Peter Walker *Political correspondent*

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Thank you for your feedback.

In a process streamlined to speed up the pumping of money into a crisis-hit economy, the bank conducted only "limited due diligence" on applications, the report said. With minimal checks, it gave permission to Greensill to lend up to £400m under the large business lending scheme.

"The Bank told us it accepted as accurate the key information applicants provided, including Greensill. For example, it carried out cross-referencing to Greensill's audited accounts but did not test in detail Greensill's claims of where it would lend," the report said.

In an indication of the pressure that bank officials were under to approve Greensill for the loan scheme, BEIS officials showed an "unusual" level of interest in Greensill's accreditation, auditors said.

"The department made eight email enquiries of the Bank over 19 weeks on the status of Greensill's accreditation and whether it might be accredited to

lend more than £50m per borrower,” the report said.

In an email dated 9 June 2020, one BEIS official wrote that “unfortunately, Spads [politically appointed special advisers] are pushing back and want information about when Greensill will be accredited to offer loans of up to £200m”.

The bank set Greensill a maximum loan limit of £50m to each borrower group, the report said, but suspended the firm’s involvement just four months after its application was approved.

Greensill was accused by the bank of contravening an agreement by giving six loans worth £240m to different parts of Gupta’s business empire on the same day.

At a meeting with the bank, Greensill officials claimed they had not broken any rules and insisted the loans to Gupta-connected firms were supported by unnamed political figures.

“Greensill said it had received ‘political steers’ that its support for the steel industry was welcome,” the report said.

Labour said the NAO report should prompt further examination of why officials and ministerial advisers took such a close interest in Greensill, and demanded to know if ministers were behind their “unusual” interest in the bank.

Seema Malhotra, the shadow business minister, said: “It’s crucial we get to the truth about the decision to accredit Greensill to the CLBILS loan scheme and the company’s relationship with GFG Alliance. This decision meant hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money was put at risk. The government must come clean.”

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Responding to the report, Meg Hillier MP, the chair of the public accounts committee, said: “Sadly, it is clear that some of this mess could have been avoided with more thorough due diligence on Greensill upfront.

“As with many of the decisions made during the pandemic, there are important lessons for the government about the trade-off between speed and accuracy in its emergency response.”

Catherine Lewis La Torre, the CEO at the British Business Bank, acknowledged that applying a less streamlined process might have led the Bank to further question Greensill’s application.

“A less streamlined accreditation process would, however, have been lengthier, meaning that fewer lenders may have been accredited, and fewer businesses would have received the critical finance they needed,” she said.

A BEIS spokesperson said: “As the NAO report makes clear, BEIS officials requested updates on Greensill’s accreditation process so the department could assess whether jobs were at risk at Liberty Steel and its supply chain. It is perfectly normal – and right – that government gathers all relevant information when approached for taxpayer funds to support a business.

“There is no suggestion whatsoever that BEIS ministers or officials sought to influence the British Business Bank’s decision. All decisions taken by the bank are made independently of government.”

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Crime reporter Peter de Vries fighting for life after Amsterdam shooting

Dutch police have detained three suspects after investigative reporter was shot in the street



Police officers guard the Amsterdam street where Peter de Vries was reportedly shot. Photograph: Eva Plevier/Reuters

Police officers guard the Amsterdam street where Peter de Vries was reportedly shot. Photograph: Eva Plevier/Reuters

Reuters in Amsterdam

Tue 6 Jul 2021 18.12 EDT

Dutch crime reporter Peter de Vries, known for his work in exposing the criminal underworld, has been shot and seriously wounded on a street in Amsterdam.

Three suspects were detained, including the possible gunmen, police said, without providing details.

“He was seriously wounded and is fighting for his life,” Amsterdam’s mayor, Femke Halsema, said in a televised news conference. “He is a national hero to us all. A rare, courageous journalist who tirelessly sought justice.”

De Vries was shot five times, including once in the head, according to local media.

Police cordoned off the area of the shooting near the downtown Leidseplein square as officers collected video footage, witness statements and forensic evidence. De Vries, 64, is a celebrity in the Netherlands, as a frequent commentator on television crime programmes and as an expert crime reporter with sources in both law enforcement and the underworld.

He is known for his [investigative work following the 1983 kidnapping of beer magnate Freddy Heineken](#). He won an international Emmy Award in 2008 for his work investigating the 2006 disappearance of teenager Natalee Holloway in Aruba.

The alleged gunman was arrested shortly afterward, newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* reported, citing anonymous sources. Police said they could neither confirm nor deny that report but they expected to update the public later Tuesday evening.

The prime minister, Mark Rutte, was expected to make a statement after meeting with leading law enforcement officials in the wake of the shooting, news agency ANP reported.

Dutch broadcaster RTL said De Vries had just left its studio in and that one of the shots hit him in the head.

Amsterdam’s *Parool* newspaper published an image of the scene with several people gathered around a person lying on the ground.

[Heineken kidnapper plotted from jail cell to kill sisters, court told](#)

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De Vries has been subjected to threats from the criminal underworld in the past in connection with several cases.

In 2013 Willem Holleeder, the Heineken kidnapper, was [convicted of making threats against De Vries](#). Holleeder is currently serving a life sentence for his involvement in five murders.

In 2019 Ridouan Taghi, currently on trial for [murder and drug trafficking](#), took the unusual step of making a public statement denying reports that he had threatened to have De Vries killed.

De Vries has been acting as a counselor, but not lawyer, to a state witness identified as Nabil B testifying in the case against Taghi and his alleged associates.

Nabil B's previous lawyer was shot and killed on an Amsterdam street in September 2019.

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UK security and counter-terrorism

‘Staggeringly high’ number of people with autism on UK Prevent scheme

Terror laws reviewer says criminal justice outcome not always right one for people with the condition



Lloyd Gunton, who has autism, was jailed for life after declaring himself an Islamic State soldier. Photograph: South Wales Police/PA

Lloyd Gunton, who has autism, was jailed for life after declaring himself an Islamic State soldier. Photograph: South Wales Police/PA

Jamie Grierson Home affairs correspondent

@JamieGrierson

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

A “staggeringly high” number of people with autism are referred to the government’s anti-radicalisation Prevent programme, a terror laws watchdog will say, calling for discussion about terrorism cases in which the disability features.

Jonathan Hall QC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, will say autism and terrorism has not received much public attention due to “a very real and respectable fear that making any sort of link will lead to stigma”.

But in a speech as part of the thinktank Bright Blue’s Ludgate lecture series online, he will argue that the criminal justice outcome may not always be the right one for people with autism and needs scrutiny.

Hall will say “autism plus” appears to be a relevant factor in many cases, meaning that for people on the autistic spectrum who are drawn into terrorist violence there tends to be some additional factor such as an “unstable family background or some other cognitive difficulty”.

He will cite four recent terrorism cases in which the defendants were autistic, including 17-year-old [Lloyd Gunton](#) who declared himself an Islamic State soldier, and was sentenced to life in prison for preparing a vehicle and knife attack in Cardiff in 2018.

In 2019, Jack Reed, who from the age of 13 had been involved in occult neo-Nazism, was jailed for nearly seven years for planning to attack Durham synagogues. In 2020, 17-year-old Paul Dunleavy was jailed for five and a half years for his involvement in attack planning in the West Midlands inspired by the far-right Feuerkrieg Division, and earlier this year a 16-year-old from Newcastle invited support for the neo-Nazi organisation National Action in the interest of creating a white ethno-state.

“My understanding is that the incidents of autism and Prevent referrals are also staggeringly high,” Hall will say.

“It is as if a social problem has been unearthed and fallen into lap of counter-terrorism professionals.

“From the point of view of counter-terrorism legislation, is the use of strong powers to detect and investigate suspected terrorism in children justified?

“I believe it is because of the potential risk to the general public. But is the criminal justice outcome the right one in all cases?

“Consider the offence of possession of material likely to be useful to a terrorist. Academics use the word remoteness to draw attention to the fact that having possession of something does not necessarily mean you are going to do something with it.

“What about autistic people who simply develop what is called a ‘special interest’ in this sort of material?”

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) launched a review at the end of last year into how many offenders are affected by neurodivergent conditions, including autism, with a view of improving support in the criminal justice system.

Marking the 16th anniversary of the 7/7 terrorist attacks that killed 72 people, Hall will say the threat from terrorism is becoming more blurred.

He will say he has “lost count” of the number of times he has been notified that an individual arrested under terrorism powers is a child.

Official statistics, most recently published in June, show that arrests for terrorism-related activity among the under-18s were fairly rare in the years 2003 to 2012: never rising above 5% of the total. The rate crept up to a maximum of 6% until March 2020. But in each of the last quarters ending March 2021 it has been between 10% and 16%.

While the greatest risk remains an Islamist terror attack, Hall will say the most dynamic new category of terrorist activity illustrates the “blurring”.

Known to investigators and analysts as mixed, unclear or uncertain (MUU) ideology, the category does not prescribe to one specific doctrine.

In 2019-20, 51% of the 6,287 referrals to Prevent comprised individuals with MUU.

After weeding out, 351 cases were discussed at a Channel panel (which decides on early intervention) and ultimately a total of 127 were adopted as Channel cases. This amounts to a 535% increase on 2018-19, when only 20 MUU cases were adopted.

Clare Hughes, Criminal Justice Manager at the National Autistic Society, said: “The vast majority of the 700,000 autistic people in the UK are law abiding.

“If autistic people do come into contact with the criminal justice system, it’s absolutely essential that professionals working in the system really understand autism and that specialist support is available for autistic children and adults when it’s needed..

“It’s so important that all media reports around autistic people as victims, witnesses, defendants and perpetrators are sensitive, accurate and balanced.”

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North America endured hottest June on record

Satellite data shows temperature peaks are lasting longer and rising higher



A Salvation Army EMS vehicle is set up as a cooling station as people lineup to get into a splash park while trying to beat the heat in Calgary, Canada. Photograph: Jeff McIntosh/AP

A Salvation Army EMS vehicle is set up as a cooling station as people lineup to get into a splash park while trying to beat the heat in Calgary, Canada. Photograph: Jeff McIntosh/AP

[Jonathan Watts](#) Global environment editor

[@jonathanwatts](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

North America endured the hottest June on record last month, according to satellite data that shows temperature peaks lasting longer as well as rising higher.

The heat dome above western [Canada](#) and the north-west United States generated headlines around the world as daily temperature records were shattered across British Columbia, Washington and Portland.

['We thought it wouldn't affect us': heatwave forces climate reckoning in Pacific north-west](#)

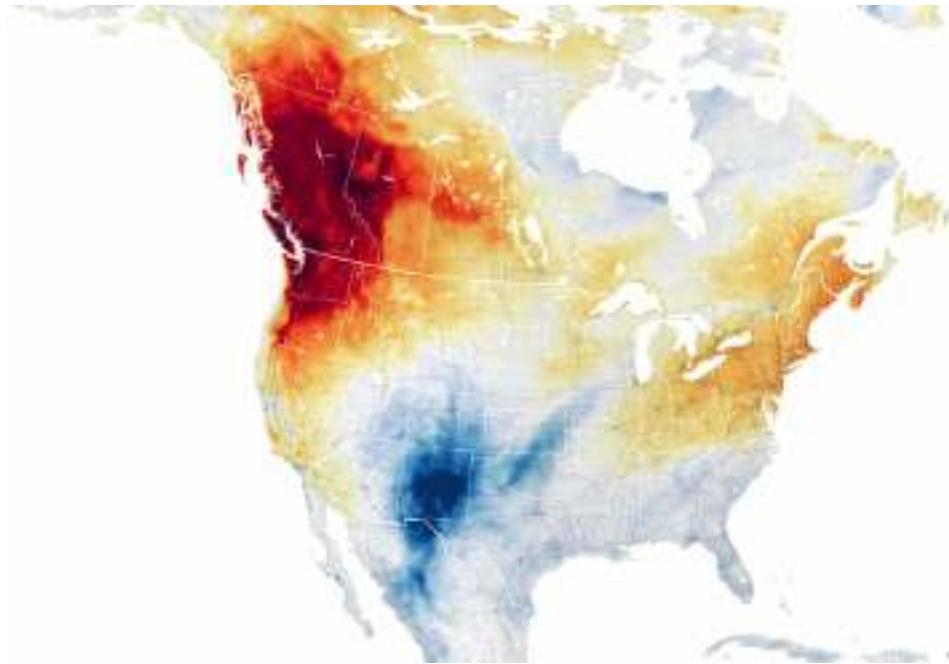
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The new data reveals this was part of a broader trend that built up over several weeks and a far wider area, which is underpinned by human-driven climate disruption.

The European Union's [Copernicus Climate Change Service](#) also revealed that June temperatures in North America were 1.2C higher than the average from 1991 to 2020, which is more than 2C above pre-industrial levels.

This is the 12th consecutive year of above-average June temperatures in the region, and the greatest increase recorded until now.

At the start of the month, the record-breaking heatwave conditions were centred over the [south-west of the US](#). They then moved over the [north-west of the US and south-west Canada](#), causing more than 500 heat-related deaths and creating tinder for wildfires. [The town of Lytton](#) in British Columbia broke Canada's heat record three days in a row. The latest hydrological bulletin shows many of the affected regions had unusually dry soil.



Air temperature anomalies across the western US and Canada on 29 June 2021. Photograph: Nasa Earth/Zuma Press Wire Service/Rex/Shutterstock

Northern Europe and Siberia also experienced an unusually hot June. Temperature records were broken in Moscow and Helsinki. The world as a whole was also warmer than average for this time of year. This would not normally be expected in the same year as a La Niña phenomenon, which is generally associated with a cooling effect.

Meteorologists said these anomalies were made more possible by the broader pattern of warming, which was caused by human emissions.

“Natural variability and a warming trend make a freakish event even more freakish,” said Carlo Buontempo, the director of the Copernicus Climate Change Service. “Because the climate is generally warming and so even in Niña year we see very high temperatures.”

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[Viktor Orbán](#)

EU urged to suspend funds to Hungary over ‘grave breaches of the rule of law’

Action follows Viktor Orbán passing law banning LGBT content in schools and mishandling of EU funds



Viktor Orbán was widely condemned by fellow EU leaders over a law banning the depiction of gay people in educational material. Photograph: Beata Zawrzel/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Viktor Orbán was widely condemned by fellow EU leaders over a law banning the depiction of gay people in educational material. Photograph: Beata Zawrzel/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jennifer Rankin in Brussels](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Ursula von der Leyen is being urged to suspend EU funds to Hungary to force Viktor Orbán to address concerns over politicised courts and corruption.

MEPs who work on the European parliament's budgetary control committee are calling on the [European Commission](#) president to use a newly created EU law to freeze payments to Hungary for "grave breaches of the rule of law".

It is the latest salvo against the Hungarian prime minister, who last month faced unprecedented criticism from fellow EU leaders over a law that bans the depiction of gay people in educational material. The European parliament is expected to condemn that law in a resolution on Thursday that will urge the commission to launch a fast-track legal case against [Hungary](#) over discrimination against LGBT people.

[EU leaders to confront Hungary's Viktor Orbán over LGBTQ+ rights](#)
[Read more](#)

Long before the Hungarian parliament [passed the controversial LGBT law](#), EU member states and MEPs were alarmed by [Hungary's spending of EU funds](#), including a contract for street lights awarded to Orbán's son-in law, as well as a vintage train to Orbán's home village.

The MEPs base their case on a report by three academics, who conclude that "grave breaches of the rule of law" mean the EU executive is legally justified in suspending payments to Hungary to protect EU taxpayers.

"The lack of transparent management of EU funds, the lack of an effective national prosecution service and the lack of guarantees of judicial independence show that Hungary has already egregiously violated basic rule-of-law principles," states the report drafted by three professors in EU law and politics.

The report highlights laboratories in 43 schools that cost €1m (£850,000) each and were part funded by the European social fund. A European Commission investigation found that each classroom was charged separately for the development of textbooks, even though all used the same book.

Brussels asked for some money to be repaid after concluding that the Hungarian authorities had not corrected several spending “irregularities”.

“What we want is for the rule of law to function in Hungary, not because we have a sanctions fetish,” said German Green MEP Daniel Freund, who commissioned the report. “We basically want the re-establishment of the rule of law.”

The MEPs are not suggesting a particular amount of money to be frozen – in 2018 Hungary received €6.3bn from the EU, equivalent to nearly 5% of its economy. The Hungarian government has requested a further €7.2bn from the EU’s coronavirus recovery fund.

It would be up to the commission to decide which EU payments to freeze, Freund said. “It should not be ordinary Hungarian citizens that suffer from this, it should punish the government, so the commission would have to identify the right budget lines,” said the MEP, who conceded that the decision would not be easy.

“I think the commission has to explain to everyone else why billions and billions of your taxpayer money is going to Hungary when there is no management and control system that works on the ground,” he said.

Any attempt to halt payments to an EU country over democratic checks and balances would be a test case for the EU’s rule of law “conditionality” regulation. Hungary’s government is challenging the law in the European court of justice, prompting concerns that the commission may be reluctant to act.

A European Commission spokesperson said: “The regulation entered into force on 1 January 2021 and the commission has been monitoring possible breaches of the rule-of-law principles that would be relevant under the regulation since day one.”

Orbán was this week was named [a “press freedom predator”](#) by Reporters Without Borders.

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Bollywood

Dilip Kumar, Bollywood legend and ‘tragedy king’ of Indian cinema, dies aged 98

The star was a defining figure in post-independence Indian cinema and was one of the country’s first method actors



Bollywood star Dilip Kumar in 2008. His career spanned many decades and won him many accolades. Photograph: B Mathur/Reuters

Bollywood star Dilip Kumar in 2008. His career spanned many decades and won him many accolades. Photograph: B Mathur/Reuters

Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Delhi

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.50 EDT

Bollywood legend Dilip Kumar, who was a defining figure in post-independence Indian cinema, has died aged 98.

Kumar had been taken to hospital in Mumbai last week suffering breathlessness, but died early Wednesday morning. “He passed away due to prolonged illness at 7.30am,” Dr Jalil Parkar of Mumbai’s Hinduja hospital said.

Kumar’s death was confirmed by a family friend who posted on Twitter on Wednesday: “With a heavy heart and profound grief, I announce the passing away of our beloved Dilip saab a few minutes ago. We are from God and to him we return.”



Dilip Kumar in the television show Nai Zindagi: Naya Jeevan in 1968.
Photograph: BBC

The news of Kumar’s death sent shockwaves of grief through [India](#). Nicknamed “the tragedy king”, he had been a beloved figure in Bollywood across generations and was one of India’s first method actors in the late 1950s, claiming he had adopted the technique before Marlon Brando.

[Why Malayalam cinema, not Bollywood, is India’s rapid-response unit for Covid films](#)

[Read more](#)

The prime minister, Narendra Modi, was among those to offer their condolences for Kumar's death. "Dilip Kumar Ji will be remembered as a cinematic legend. He was blessed with unparalleled brilliance, due to which audiences across generations were enthralled," Modi said in a tweet.

"His passing away is a loss to our cultural world. Condolences to his family, friends and innumerable admirers."

Dilip Kumar Ji will be remembered as a cinematic legend. He was blessed with unparalleled brilliance, due to which audiences across generations were enthralled. His passing away is a loss to our cultural world. Condolences to his family, friends and innumerable admirers.
RIP.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [July 7, 2021](#)

Kumar's best known films from his five-decade long career included Devdas, Naya Daur (New Age), Ram Aur Shyam, Madhumati and Mughal-e-Azam, which was released in 1960, took eight years to make at a cost of 15m rupees and remains one of the biggest-grossing Bollywood films of all time.

Kumar, whose real name was Yusuf Khan, was born in 1922 in pre-independence India in the city of Peshawar, which is now part of Pakistan, the son of a fruit merchant and one of 12 children. After moving to Bombay, now Mumbai, Kumar fell into acting accidentally as a means to make money, but in 1947 his films began garnering critical acclaim.



A mural of Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar in Mumbai. Photograph: Indranil Mukherjee/AFP/Getty Images

His career took off and alongside Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor, Kumar became one of the three big names who dominated the golden age of Indian cinema from the 1940s to the 60s.

Kumar's career suffered a lull in the 70s, when a new generation of actors such as Amitabh Bachan stole the limelight, but he reinvented himself in the 80s and 90s with roles in big blockbusters such as *Kranti*, *Karma* and *Shakti*, though was still known for being selective in his choice of roles.

Kumar starred in his last film in 1998 and then began moving into politics, becoming a legislator for the opposition Congress party. However, he became a politically divisive figure when he accepted the highest civilian honour from the Pakistan government in 1998, and was deemed a traitor to India and anti-national. He refused to return the reward.

Towards the end of his life, Kumar was showered with awards recognising his contribution to Indian cinema. In 2006, he accepted a lifetime achievement award at India's National Film Awards in recognition of his contribution to Indian cinema, and last year the Guinness Book of World

Records recognised him for having a record-breaking number of best actor awards.

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[Coronavirus](#)

What are the risks of England unlocking in the Covid third wave?



The number of new Covid cases is doubling roughly every nine days in the UK, even before further unlocking. Illustration: Guardian Design/Getty/Shutterstock

The number of new Covid cases is doubling roughly every nine days in the UK, even before further unlocking. Illustration: Guardian Design/Getty/Shutterstock

Analysis: Boris Johnson is betting big by easing rules on 19 July despite new infections rising exponentially

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Ian Sample Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Lifting the final Covid restrictions in England on 19 July is a gamble for the government. Even without further easing, cases are on course to surpass 50,000 a day by mid-July. Thereafter they could swiftly exceed the winter peak of 81,000 and [hit 100,000 or more](#), the health secretary has said. What the next wave means for lives and the NHS is still deeply uncertain – but the science offers some clues.

Cases

A third wave of coronavirus infections is well under way in the UK. The number of new cases is doubling roughly every nine days, according to the government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance. If the pace doesn't slow, the national epidemic could soon grow larger than the second wave that hit the country in the winter.

[How the second and third waves compare](#)

Early July has seen average daily cases above 25,000. While [Boris Johnson](#) noted at the Downing Street briefing on Monday that cases could reach 50,000 a day by 19 July – the date England is expected to lift the last remaining Covid restrictions – the number could be higher. Even without further easing, which will increase the growth rate, cases could reach 50,000 a day in the week before full reopening and 100,000 a day by the end of the month – more cases than the UK has recorded at any point in the crisis.

Modelling by teams feeding into the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) anticipates cases rising through July and peaking in August. The majority of infections will be in younger people who are not fully vaccinated. But what happens in the real world is far from clear because of important uncertainties, not least in vaccination rates, coverage, and people's behaviour relating to mixing and taking precautions after 19 July. Lifting restrictions will undoubtedly give the epidemic a boost, though the closure of schools for the summer holidays will reduce the impact a little.

Hospitalisations and the impact on the NHS

Hospitalisations are expected to track infections with a delay of a week or two. The steep rise in infections will lead to an exponential increase in hospitalisations – meaning they too will double over a fixed period of time – but the rise should be far smaller than seen this winter. The main difference is vaccination, though immunity after natural infection plays a role too. About two-thirds of the UK population has now received one shot of Covid vaccine, with 51% having had both. Because the rollout started with older and more vulnerable people, those being treated in hospital today are younger than they were in the winter and less likely to die from the disease.

Timing of step 4

Prof Neil Ferguson, who runs the Imperial College modelling group advising Sage, says the ratio of cases to hospitalisations has been cut by more than two-thirds compared with the winter wave, and as more people get their second doses, that reduction will continue. Modelling by the University of Warwick, which necessarily made assumptions about the spread of the virus, vaccine rollout and effectiveness, suggests hospitalisations in England may peak at about 1,300 a day in late July and August, but as ever, the assumptions in the modelling mean little is certain.

This is the gamble the government is taking. At the height of the winter wave, daily hospitalisations peaked at more than 4,000 a day in England, and the [NHS](#) may be spared similar pressure this summer. But if cases get very high, in the order of 150,000 or 200,000 a day, then hospitalisations could still put stress on the [NHS](#) and deaths will be correspondingly higher.

“Even if vaccines do keep deaths at low levels, current trends in hospital admissions, if extrapolated to the levels of transmission that we know from other countries that this virus can reach, could put a severe strain on the NHS,” said Azra Ghani, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at Imperial.

The focus on coronavirus admissions does not take into account of the demand the NHS will face from patients with long Covid, also known as post-Covid syndrome. Young people and those who are not sick enough to

go to hospital with the disease are still at risk of long Covid and may drive up demand on specialist services and long Covid clinics for many months. The NHS is also dealing with an unprecedented backlog of [5 million people awaiting treatment](#) in England.

Deaths

Full vaccination, with two shots of either AstraZeneca or Pfizer, is more than 90% effective at preventing deaths from the Delta variant of Covid. According to Ferguson, deaths from a given number of cases are now 10 times lower than during the winter wave, which peaked in the UK with more than 68,000 cases a day and 1,800 daily deaths. About 99% of UK deaths from Covid have been in those aged 40 and over, and by 19 July nearly everyone in that age group will have been offered two shots of a vaccine.

As the vaccine programme pushes into those aged 18 and over, the impact is more on blocking transmission of the virus than on preventing the deaths of the individuals vaccinated. Because younger people have more contacts, they tend to spread the virus more than older groups, but the more cases there are among young adults and schoolchildren, the greater the chance of the virus finding vulnerable people who have not been jabbed, or who had a poor immune response to the vaccine.

Vaccines and herd immunity

All adults should have been offered both jabs by mid-September, but as the vaccination programme rolls on, infections will continue to spread and bolster the population's immunity further. The rising levels of immunity will slow the spread of the virus, but to make the epidemic fizzle out, the country must reach the elusive threshold for herd immunity.

The threshold itself isn't clear-cut, and varies depending on who spreads the virus, but if the R (reproduction) number for an unmitigated Delta variant epidemic is seven, as Public [Health](#) England's Dr Susan Hopkins told MPs, then transmission may need to be completely blocked in at least 85% of the population.

The Office for National Statistics estimates that more than 85% of adults in England have antibodies to coronavirus, but having antibodies does not necessarily stop people becoming infected and passing the virus on. And since adults make up only 80% of the population, there is still some way to go. The threshold may only be met when everyone has good immunity from multiple vaccine doses or infections.

New variants

More infected individuals means a higher risk of new variants emerging. The UK's planned easing of restrictions, coupled with its strategy of vaccinating down the age groups, makes a substantial epidemic likely in the coming weeks, and with that comes a real risk of new variants. The Delta variant is more dangerous largely because it is so transmissible, though it is also a little more resistant to vaccines. The risk in the months ahead is that a new variant emerges that has substantial vaccine resistance. If that happens, an autumn booster programme, which is being planned for the 50s and over, may be enough to keep the epidemic under control. But in the longer term, vaccines are expected to need updating to match the most common variants in circulation.

“With just over 50% of the population fully vaccinated, by letting the virus run through the population, we are creating the perfect conditions for the selection of mutations that allow the virus to evade the vaccine. This strategy may therefore not only be risky for England, but could also set back the global fight against the pandemic,” said Ghani.

Reinstating restrictions

Unless a new, more problematic variant pops up, the risk of the next wave overwhelming the NHS remains an unlikely worst-case scenario for outbreak modellers on Sage. It is still absolutely possible, though: [previous worst-case scenarios](#) during the pandemic have turned out to be optimistic. But after previously stressing the need for the lifting of restrictions to be irreversible, Boris Johnson refused on Monday to rule out reinstating restrictions if need be. “If, heaven forbid, some really awful new bugs

should appear, then clearly we will have to take whatever steps we need to do to protect the public," he said.

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[New Zealand](#)

New Zealand not willing to risk UK-style ‘live with Covid’ policy, says Jacinda Ardern

Country may place UK on no-fly list if cases explode, as PM says countries are making ‘different choices’ on deaths from coronavirus

01:22

Ardern says 'different countries are taking different choices' on accepting Covid deaths – video

[Tess McClure](#) in Christchurch

[@tessairini](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 23.20 EDT

New Zealand has dismissed suggestions it should follow in Britain's footsteps to “live with” Covid-19, saying the level of death proposed by [Boris Johnson](#) would be “unacceptable”.

If cases in Britain explode as a result of the lifted regulations, [New Zealand](#) may also consider putting the country on a no-fly list.

On Monday, Johnson announced [plans to scrap regulations including on face masks and social distancing by 19 July](#), saying that Britain must “learn to live with” the virus. He said Covid cases would likely reach 50,000 a day within a fortnight, and “we must reconcile ourselves, sadly, to more deaths from Covid”.

“That’s not something that we have been willing to accept in New Zealand,” the country’s Covid-19 response minister, Chris Hipkins, said at a press conference alongside the prime minister, [Jacinda Ardern](#), on Tuesday.

[Air VnV: sold-out flights start from Taiwan to Guam for ‘vacation and vaccination’ trips](#)

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“One of the things the UK government have been very clear about [is] that there will be a spike in cases, potentially thousands of cases a day. There will be more people dying,” he said.

“We are likely to see more incremental change than dramatic change where we wake up one morning and say: ‘We just go back to the way things were before Covid-19.’”

Ardern, asked whether the country would accept deaths from Covid, said: “Different countries are taking different choices.

“The priority for me is how do we continue to preserve what New Zealand has managed to gain and give ourselves options, because this virus is not done with the world yet.”

Director-general of health, Ashley Bloomfield, said on Wednesday that New Zealand would be “watching closely” and could place the UK on a no-fly list if cases grew out of control.

“If they do get an increase in cases, we will be keeping a close eye on what that means for the risk of people traveling from the UK and that will inform our decisions here,” he said.

Asked if that could result in suspending flights, as [New Zealand did with India in April](#), he said: “We actually review the risk status of all countries each week, so clearly if there is an increase in the number of cases that’s one of the things we’ll be watching very closely.”

Epidemiologist and public health professor Michael Baker said New Zealand’s future roadmap could be built on a mixture of high vaccination and other measures such as mask mandates, or limited lockdowns to contain outbreaks. He said the country was in a “privileged position” where it could make an informed choice about whether to continue with an elimination approach or change tack.

“By every metric [New Zealand’s elimination approach] is outperforming the alternatives – from a public health point of view, an equity point of view, a freedoms point of view … an economic point of view.”

[Boris Johnson ends Covid as a ‘me problem’ and makes it a ‘you problem’ |](#)
[Zoe Williams](#)

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Australia’s Covid current response is still very closely aligned with New Zealand’s in practice, but prime minister Scott Morrison’s rhetoric has recently shifted somewhat toward Johnson’s. Last week Morrison outlined [a four-phase Australian reopening roadmap](#), saying that by phase three Covid would be treated like the flu or “any other infectious disease”.

Baker said public health professionals were “disturbed” by the UK’s return to allowing Covid to circulate unchecked, and that the phrase “living with it” was a “meaningless slogan” that failed to communicate the consequences of millions of infections, or the alternative options for managing the virus.

“We often absorb a lot of our rhetoric from Europe and North America, which have really managed the pandemic very badly,” he said. “I don’t think we should necessarily follow or accept Boris Johnson and co saying: ‘Oh, we have to learn to live with virus.’

“We always have to be a bit sceptical about learning lessons from countries that have failed very badly.”

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Heathrow to pilot fast-track lanes for vaccinated arrivals

Airline industry steps up pressure on ministers to open up quarantine-free travel for amber countries

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Arriving passengers queue at Heathrow airport in June. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Arriving passengers queue at Heathrow airport in June. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

PA Media

Tue 6 Jul 2021 19.23 EDT

Heathrow is to provide fast-track lanes for fully vaccinated arrivals as the airline industry steps up pressure on ministers to open up quarantine-free travel to amber destinations.

Under a pilot programme to be launched this week, passengers from selected destinations will be able to upload their coronavirus vaccination certificate before boarding.

On arrival at the airport, they will then be directed to dedicated lanes at the border to speed their passage through immigration.

The move comes before an expected announcement this week when the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, will set out details of the government's plans [for travellers from amber list countries](#) to self-isolate on arrival.

Ministers reportedly favour a policy that would take effect before August to waive quarantine rules for double-vaccinated passengers from amber-list countries to England.

Heathrow with British Airways and Virgin Atlantic – the two airlines involved in the trial programme – said it was essential that there was no delay in implementing the changes.

The scheme will initially involve fully vaccinated volunteers travelling on selected flights from Athens, Los Angeles, Montego Bay and New York.

The Heathrow chief executive, John Holland-Kaye, said: “This pilot will allow us to show that pre-departure and arrival checks of vaccination status can be carried out safely at check in, so that fully vaccinated passengers can avoid quarantine from 19 July.”

His comments were echoed by the Virgin Atlantic chief executive, Shai Weiss, who said: “To reap the benefits of the UK’s world-leading vaccine rollout, the UK government must act now to remove self-isolation for fully vaccinated passengers arriving from ‘amber’ countries, and no later than the domestic reopening on 19 July.

“The UK is already falling behind [the] US and EU and a continued overly cautious approach towards international travel will further impact economic recovery and the 500,000 UK jobs that are at stake.”

The call came after the health secretary, Sajid Javid, announced that people in England who have been double jabbed – as well as the under-18s – [will](#)

no longer have to self-isolate if they have been in contact with someone who tests positive for Covid-19.

However, there was consternation among some Tory MPs that the change will not come into force until 16 August, almost a month after other controls are due to have ended.

With cases continuing to soar, there were fears that millions of people could be required to quarantine in the meantime, potentially damaging output just as the economy hopes to pick up pace.

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Double-jabbed contacts won't need to self-isolate from 16 August, says Javid

Close contacts of people in England who test positive will not have to self-isolate if they have had both vaccinations

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01:29

Javid: no need for fully vaccinated Covid contacts to self-isolate from 16 August – video

Peter Walker
[@peterwalker99](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 08.01 EDT

Close contacts of people in England who have tested positive for Covid will not have to self-isolate if they have received both their vaccinations, or if they are under 18, [Sajid Javid](#) has announced to the Commons.

The policy will come into force from 16 August. Adults will need to have had their second vaccination at least 10 days beforehand, the health secretary told MPs on Tuesday.

“We will soon be able to take a risk-based approach that recognises the huge benefits that the vaccines provide both to people who get the jab and their loved ones too,” Javid said.

People will, however, still be obliged to self-isolate as before if they test positive for Covid.

[UK scientists caution that lifting of Covid rules is like building ‘variant factories’](#)

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The end to self-isolation for those under 18, [more details of which were given by the education secretary, Gavin Williamson](#), comes after [figures showed](#) the number of children missing school in England because of Covid last week shot up by 66%, with 641,000 out of the classroom.

In another indication of his more bullish approach to reopening, Javid began his announcement by telling MPs that “freedom is in our sights once again” and it was time to end top-down rules and rely more on “personal responsibility and common sense”.

The health secretary said the pace of vaccination had weakened the link between case numbers and hospitalisations and deaths. “That protective wall means that the odds have shifted in our favour and we can look afresh at many of the measures that we have had to put in place,” he said.

Responding for Labour, the shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, said the protective wall was “only half built”, saying this involved not only people who were not yet fully vaccinated but also that people with both vaccinations could still contract and transmit the virus, as suggested by [emerging evidence from Israel](#).

In media interviews earlier in the day, [Javid said](#) the lifting of most lockdown rules could result in Covid infections rising above 100,000 a day over the summer.

Ashworth said: “With infections at 100,000 that translates to around 5,000 people a day developing long-term chronic illness. What will the long Covid waiting list look like by the end of the summer?

“He justifies allowing infections to climb so high by pointing to the weakened link between hospitalisation and deaths. And that we are building a protective wall. But the wall is only half built.”

Ashworth repeated Labour's demand that the government reconsider the complete removal of all mandatory mask rules. Javid rejected this, saying that with the scale of vaccinations "you need to start moving away from these restrictions".

The statement came a day after Boris Johnson announced the expected move towards almost no formal rules to combat Covid in England from 19 July, including the end of mandatory mask use and social distancing, or any restrictions in hospitality and entertainment venues.

Asked in his earlier interview about government projections that infection rates were likely to reach 50,000 a day by 19 July, Javid accepted it was "fair to say" that even this figure could double or more. The highest daily infection rate for the UK recorded so far was just over 81,000, in late December.

"Because this is uncharted territory for any country in the world, as you go further out, week by week, the projections are even less reliable," he said. "As we ease and go into the summer, we expect them to rise. They could go as high as 100,000. We want to be very straightforward about this in what we can expect in terms of case numbers. But what matters more than anything is hospitalisation and death numbers."

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Air VnV: sold-out flights start from Taiwan to Guam for ‘vacation and vaccination’ trips

About 170 people, some wearing hazmat suits, were the first to fly to the Pacific island for a holiday with a Covid twist



Travellers board flights from Taipei to Guam under the Covid ‘vacation and vaccination’ scheme, designed to revive Guam’s tourism industry.
Photograph: Lion Travel

Travellers board flights from Taipei to Guam under the Covid ‘vacation and vaccination’ scheme, designed to revive Guam’s tourism industry.
Photograph: Lion Travel

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About this content

Mar-Vic Cagurangan in Guam and Helen Davidson in Taipei

Tue 6 Jul 2021 18.47 EDT

On Tuesday afternoon in Taipei about 170 people, some dressed in hazmat suits and face shields, boarded a plane bound for the Pacific island of Guam.

The sold-out flight was a package holiday with a Covid twist: dubbed “Air V&V” (vacation and vaccination), Guam is capitalising on its abundance of vaccines to revive its tourism industry, and Taiwan’s residents are the first customers.

Guam, a US territory in Micronesia, announced the tours in June, with the campaign pitch “vacation while you wait”.

The island has fully vaccinated about 75% of its adult population. Taiwan, suffering major shortages, has given at least one dose to just over 10% and fully vaccinated about 0.2%.

A victim of its own success: how Taiwan failed to plan for a major Covid outbreak

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The first four Air V&V tours from Taiwan, carrying a total 439 travellers, have sold out.

“This program captures a unique demographic of travellers around the world that are tired of waiting to get vaccinated in this pandemic,” Carl Gutierrez, president of the Guam Visitors Bureau in Guam, said in June.

“This will give a shot in the arm to our tourism industry through this unique and valuable service, offering more opportunities to put our people back to work and get our economy roaring again.”

The program involves a dozen hotels, hosting travellers while they receive the Pfizer, Moderna or single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccines from Guam’s private clinics. Taiwanese people can book on one of 10 tours, ranging from five to 22 days, getting the first shot on the day after they touch down before freely touring the country.



Guam-bound Taiwanese at Taipei airport. Photograph: Lion Travel

The most popular vaccine so far is Moderna, chosen by 38% of people with bookings, followed by Pfizer at 34% and Johnson & Johnson at 23%, the major Taiwan travel agency Lion Travel said on Tuesday.

In Taiwan, multiple factors have led to major shortages in doses, worsened by the island's first major outbreak of the pandemic, beginning in April.

Authorities are rushing to vaccinate people in order of priority groups but have been hindered by low supplies, alleged foreign intervention by China and hesitancy fuelled by fake news.

['Vax-n-win': Guam launches lottery prize for vaccine recipients](#)

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Data released by Lion Travel suggested Guam's offering was proving most popular among those in Taiwan who have little hope of getting a local vaccine soon. Lion Travel's general manager, Andy Yu, said almost 73% of bookings were for people aged under 49, with the biggest cohort aged 20 to 29 and 40 to 49.

Other regions, including Bali and the Maldives, have flagged similar ventures, but Guam is among the first to actually receive travellers.

Ahead of the first flight arriving on Tuesday afternoon, there was a mixture of excitement and anxiety among hotel employees preparing for the incoming guests and the reopening of Guam's tourism.



Beaches at Ritidian Point in Guam's north. Photograph: Bill Bachmann/Alamy

“We are hiring additional people in anticipation of large number of arrivals,” said Maria Teresa Reyes-Burrier, food and beverage director at Lotte Guam Resort.

“We are implementing protective and mitigation measures and we are training new hires to make sure they are familiar with the Covid-related guidelines in place,” she said.

“The reopening of tourism is something we look forward to and we are hoping it will be safe for our incoming guests and our employees.”

Jen Vee, 25, a store attendant at Hyatt Regency Guam’s gift shop, said she was still “pretty nervous about Covid” but looked forward to the revival of Guam tourism.

[How Taiwan’s struggle for Covid vaccines is inflaming tensions with China](#)
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“This is good news for many people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic. It’s exciting but still pretty scary at the same time.”

There might be some concern among employees about the arrival of unvaccinated passengers, but Chito De Guzman-Aguilo, marketing manager at Guam Reef Resort and Spa, said: “It’s just a matter of ensuring that protocols and guidelines are implemented effectively and efficiently.”

Lion Travel’s Yu said more than 80% of tickets for the first 22-day-long tour had sold. He didn’t say how many cancellations there had been following last week’s reintroduction of self-paid hotel quarantine for returning travellers in Taiwan.

The Air V&V package tours start at around US\$1,400 for flights and hotels but don’t cover the cost of pre-departure Covid tests – required to bypass Guam quarantine – or the vaccines, which add hundreds of dollars. On Taiwanese social media many commenters expressed anger at the vaccine

access for those who could afford it while compatriots at home had to wait and hope.

“So is it that you can get vaccinated abroad if you’re rich, otherwise you have to wait or die in Taiwan,” said one.

“This means the government is incompetent and it’s the people who have to save themselves,” said another.

The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention has lowered Guam’s Covid exposure risk to a moderate level, and daily Covid-19 infections have been low.

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Miss Mexico 2021 organisers press ahead with pageant despite Covid surge among contestants

Some women had coughs or a fever but were reportedly told ‘not to complain’



Miss Mexico 2021 contestants in the northern city of Chihuahua. Almost half of them, as well as a pageant staff member, tested positive for Covid-19.
Photograph: El Diario/Reuters

Miss Mexico 2021 contestants in the northern city of Chihuahua. Almost half of them, as well as a pageant staff member, tested positive for Covid-19.
Photograph: El Diario/Reuters

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[David Agren](#) in Mexico City

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Tue 6 Jul 2021 22.55 EDT

Organisers pushed ahead with a Mexican beauty pageant in spite of a Covid-19 outbreak that infected almost half the contestants, it has emerged.

At least 15 of the 32 contestants in the Miss [Mexico](#) 2021 pageant tested positive for coronavirus. A pageant staff member also tested positive, according to the Chihuahua state health secretariat.

“Even though many [of the contestants] were coughing, had body aches and even a temperature, they asked them not to complain,” a source from the pageant told the newspaper Reforma.

Prior to the pageant the contestants travelled to a school run in the scenic but impoverished Copper Canyon run by nuns for indigenous Tarahumara children, where they delivered school supplies and posed for selfies with the students. The source told Reforma that “a minimum 10 [contestants] had symptoms” on that trip.

Organisers in the northern city of Chihuahua proceeded with the pageant on 1 July – two days ahead of schedule. It is unknown why the date was changed and organisers have not commented.

'Eye of fire': Gas leak sparks huge blaze on ocean surface off Mexico Read more

Health officials in Chihuahua state accused the organisers of being uncooperative and attempting to cover up the rash of Covid cases. The state health secretariat said in a statement it was tipped off on the outbreak by an anonymous call.

“The state health secretariat regrets the lack of honesty and transparency from the organising committee,” the statement said.

The pageant outbreak comes as Covid cases surge in a country that has taken a somewhat less-strict approach to lockdowns, closing borders and mandating mask use while performing little testing.

On Tuesday, health officials reported the largest increase in new daily coronavirus infections since late February.

The health secretariat reported 7,989 new confirmed cases of Covid along with 269 more fatalities, bringing the overall total to 2,549,862 infections and 233,958 deaths. Roughly 15% of the population is fully vaccinated, while 25.1% of Mexicans have received a single dose.

Reuters also contributed to this report.

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England

Fourth time lucky? England's superfans dream of Euro 2020 glory

They've seen three semi-final defeats but hope for a different result against Denmark



England's dreaming: (from left to right) Andrew Payne and his wife, Kirsty; Billy Grant; Gary Gates; Melanie Couldrey. Composite: The Guardian

England's dreaming: (from left to right) Andrew Payne and his wife, Kirsty; Billy Grant; Gary Gates; Melanie Couldrey. Composite: The Guardian



Alexandra Topping

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Billy Grant knows the agony of being a lifelong [England](#) superfan. Part of the legion of hardcore followers who have travelled the length and breadth of the world supporting their country, he has watched [England](#) go out at the semi-finals stage three times: at the World Cup in Italy in 1990, on home turf during Euro 1996, and at the last World Cup in Russia in 2018.

But as England approach their [Euro 2020](#) semi-final tie against Denmark on Wednesday, he has no regrets, only that burgeoning hope every football fan understands is the ultimate cause of their demise.

Does he believe it could be fourth time lucky for him, and Gareth Southgate's England?

"I believe they'll do it," says Grant, co-presenter of Brentford FC's Beesotted podcast. "They need a little bit of luck, but we've been unlucky in

the past. But we can't be unlucky for ever, you know, luck evens itself out over time."

Along with about 56 million others, he is hoping that Wednesday will be the day that fortune finally smiles on England and sees them progress to the final of a major football tournament for the first time since 1966. If they do, they will face Italy in the final on Sunday, with Downing Street confirming that pubs will be allowed to stay open until 23.15 so fans can watch.

Melanie Couldrey was 28 when she took a month off work to go to Italia 90, a World Cup that has taken on a mythic status with fans. "It was my favourite summer ever," she says unsurprisingly.

She was meant to go home after the quarter-finals but when England progressed, booked a ticket to Turin to see England take on West Germany. With the final score 1-1, the game went into extra time and, as the deadlock still couldn't be broken, on to penalties.

After Gary Lineker, Peter Beardsley and David Platt scored the first three, Stuart Pearce and Chris Waddle failed to convert, sending Bobby's Robson's team home. The following day she bought a copy of *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, which had the subheading *Ma Che grande Inghilterra!* (But what a great England!). "At least we were appreciated," she says.

Gary Gates remembers an electric atmosphere at the European Championship in England in 1996, with the fans singing the recently released Three Lions, which had become an unofficial anthem, on repeat in a highly charged Wembley.

"The noise in the crowd and the excitement was absolutely unbelievable. It just seemed to bring the whole country together. I've never been at an event where it was just pure joy," he says.

But the joy was short-lived. After Paul Gascoigne missed a chance to win the game in extra time, it went to penalties.

Couldrey, who was also there, remembers the moment Southgate, a centre-back who stepped up when others did not, came forward to take a sudden-

death penalty.

“I can remember the angle we were watching it from, and I remember seeing him walk up and then, well, you know,” she says. Southgate missed and England were out again. “I was so deflated,” she says. “I only lived in London but it felt like it took hours and hours to get home.”

Gates thinks the agony of England’s near-misses will prevent any complacency before Wednesday’s game. “We need to make sure we don’t underestimate the competition and look forward to the final,” he says. “I’m confident, but nervous..”

Andy Payne was 27 when he saw England lose in the Italia 90 semi-final but it didn’t stop him travelling the world with the team, and like Grant he saw them lose the semi-final in 1996 and against Croatia in 2018.

Now 58, he says the team that defied expectations then can live up to the potential they showed three years ago. He praises Southgate for the quiet, empathic leadership he says has transformed England from a group of individual stars to a team that works for each other.

“Those players believe in their leader, and he believes in his squad,” he says. “The karma police have definitely given England their blessings.”

He’ll be at the game with his wife, Kirsty. This time, he’s confident that England will finally get the result. And if they don’t? “Then I’ll call you in a year-and-a-half’s time from Qatar and say: ‘You know what, I think it’s going to be this time, I can feel it.’”

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The Guardian For 200 years

[The outspokenAnorexia](#)

Interview

Hope Virgo: the woman who survived anorexia – and began Dump the Scales

[Zoe Williams](#)



I used to watch people eat at university and think: “Why can’t I eat that?””: Hope Virgo. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

I used to watch people eat at university and think: “Why can’t I eat that?””: Hope Virgo. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Hospitalised with an eating disorder as a teenager, she recovered to become a campaigner. Her mission? To show that eating disorders aren’t always visible



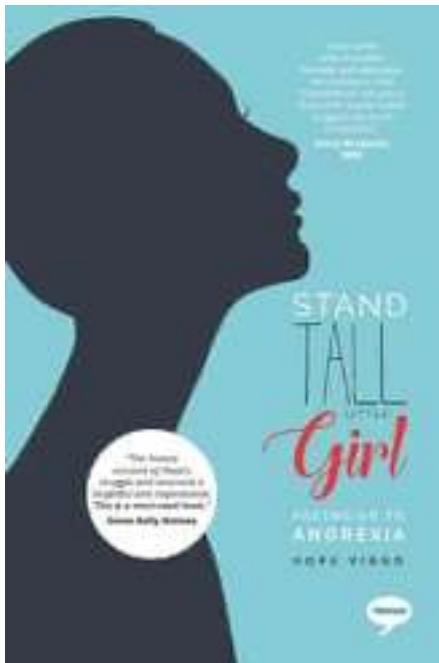
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Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Hope Virgo’s description of her descent into anorexia is so harrowing and filled with danger that meeting her in real life – in the south London flat she shares with her fiance – is like meeting the personification of triumph or optimism. “In the media, you see the same stories, the same distressed, emaciated person; you hear of people dying,” Virgo says. “We need to hear those stories, but at the same time, I really believe that a full recovery is possible. I think we lose sight of that glimmer of hope.”

In her book *Stand Tall Little Girl*, she gives the figures to back this up: 40% of people who have had an eating disorder never think about it again; 15%

are unable to fight it off and are stuck in it; and 45% of people find a way to live with it, using coping mechanisms. Virgo's pioneering work has an overarching purpose: to say, in her words and through her actions, that recovery is possible. It's a rescue mission launched from regular life into a world of crisis – in which no one is seen as irrecoverable.



Hope Virgo's *Stand Tall Little Girl: Facing Up to Anorexia*.

She began her activism with [the campaign Dump the Scales](#) – a challenge to the idea that treatment for eating-disorder patients can be tied to their BMI. “I was trying to make sure that people with eating disorders could get treatment on the NHS regardless of what their BMI is. And now I’m trying to take it further, to get people to understand that not all eating disorders are visible. Regardless of someone’s size or their shape, the question is what their eating patterns are, what their food behaviours are like.”

Dump the Scales started as a practical struggle: fundraising and campaigning on the principle that the [constellation of eating disorders](#) – anorexia nervosa, [bulimia nervosa](#), [binge-eating disorder](#) and other specified feeding or eating disorders, responsible for more loss of life than any other mental health condition – require a much more complex clinical response. At the moment, the Nice (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) guidelines on treatment specify that BMI should not be the only diagnostic measure used,

but many people find it hard to access treatment if they are not technically underweight. “In fact,” Virgo says, “only 6% of people with an eating disorder are actually underweight.”

Over time, Virgo’s thinking developed to take on a more cultural challenge, and last year she gave up work to campaign full time. “There’s something fundamentally wrong with the way eating disorders are treated. We get fixated on that teenage white skinny girl, but that’s such a small part of the story.” When the disorder is seen as a diet gone wrong, a choice, something you can grow out of, it becomes trivialised. That stigma prevents people seeking help and acts as a block on the deeper understanding that is urgently needed to improve outcomes.

There is also work to be done on the way we think about food and body image as a society. “We have normalised eating disorder culture,” Virgo says, “and whilst dieting doesn’t necessarily cause an eating disorder, I do think it has a role to play in making us question our bodies, our relationships with food.

“Last night, I did a session for parents, and I just wanted them to think about the fact that we’re all so embedded in eating-disorder culture. There are a lot of people who have a really unhealthy relationship with food and exercise, and we just accept that it’s fine. That normalises it. I have to keep saying: ‘It’s not fine.’ Particularly in the pandemic, everyone was talking about how much weight they were going to lose. You could always be thinner. But that won’t make you happy.”

Clinical preconceptions are in a feedback loop with a culture that both valorises thinness and sees it as the sine qua non of disordered eating. Anyone with an eating disorder who isn’t underweight is discredited by this fundamental misunderstanding of what the illness is, which makes it very hard to seek help – particularly if, when you try, you are not taken seriously. It is incredibly rare for anyone who isn’t underweight to talk openly about anorexia, understandably. When the plus-size model Tess Holliday revealed earlier this year that she was anorexic and in recovery, she faced an explosion of opinions that she summarised at the time: “I’ve had a lot of messages from folks that are anorexic that are livid and angry because they feel like I’m lying.” If clinicians also struggle to believe in a mental illness

that they can't see on the scales, it creates a wall of silence. "I was just so fed up with the way eating disorders were treated, the real lack of understanding around them," Virgo says. "I felt I really had to do something."

It was in November 2007, at the age of 17, that Virgo herself was admitted to hospital because her BMI had dropped far enough that the doctors considered her life was in danger. Six months before that, she had started treatment with child and adolescent mental health services for her eating disorder, which, to her mind, was when the problems started. Since the age of 13, she had been rigidly controlling her calorie intake and exercising obsessively. She once ran a half-marathon having eaten nothing for four days. She avoided her meals at school by giving away her food, and those at home in the melee of being one of five children.

But it was only when professionals got involved, she feels, that she started having to hide her behaviour, which unleashed a dark inventiveness. Before every weigh-in, she would down water. She would vomit after every meal, counting the food out. She would exercise excessively. The sheer pain screams from her description, and she finds it cathartic now to write and talk about it. "I think I romanticised being unwell because it served a purpose at the time. But, describing it, I can see that I was never happy. So that helps, because otherwise when you have a bad day, you always think: 'Maybe if I went back to that behaviour, that might work.'"

Virgo is slightly chary of tracing her anorexia back to a direct cause. "I really struggled with being the middle child. I've always felt quite different to everyone else in my family. They just got on with stuff differently – accepted that we had conflict at home, and that things were really difficult at points. But I was fixated on trying to resolve all of these issues and fix everything."

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Virgo describes a therapist she saw when she was nine, who would try to get her to draw her feelings, then get cross with her for poor draughtsmanship. By 13, she had found her own solution. "Anorexia got me. It was such an amazing coping mechanism. It would start telling me to calorie count or to

ruminate over food and it numbed a lot of the stuff that I didn't want to feel.”

Virgo was then sexually abused by an older man, which had a profound effect. “I felt like there was something categorically wrong with me, that I’d done something wrong and it was my fault. I think, after that happened, I carried a lot of that with me, and every time somebody didn’t respond in a way that I thought they were going to, it meant that I wasn’t lovable.”

The events of these years also baked in a pattern of thinking – that weight loss meant approval, and that there was nothing else intrinsic in her to approve of. Virgo is getting married this August, and describes, ruefully, how the voices still battle in her head. “There’s always part of you thinking, ‘If I did lose weight, maybe I’d look better on the day, and everyone else will have a better day.’ But that is not the truth. They’ll have a better day if I’m eating and I’m happy.”

As the illness progressed, she found allies at school and online, where there were huge communities swapping tips on avoiding food and tricking the people around you.

I remember being really frustrated, looking at my grandmother on the bed, thinking: ‘Why can’t you just eat? I’ve done it, you should be able to do it’

Yet she is keen to emphasise that it was no one thing – and certainly no one feature of modern life or the internet – that caused the anorexia. “It's 50% down to your genetics, and I did often wonder if there was a genetic predisposition even before I saw that research.” Virgo’s grandmother suffered with disordered eating all her life, and Virgo tells an absolutely tragic story of going to visit her in hospital, just as she herself was at the end of an almost year-long stay on the eating-disorder unit. “When my grandad died, my grandmother just decided to not eat any more. She wasn’t in a psychiatric ward, she was on an old people’s ward. I think at that point, they’d probably just given up on her. I remember being really frustrated, looking at her on the bed, thinking: ‘Why can’t you just eat? I’ve done it, you should be able to do it.’”

Being in hospital herself, however, saved her life, although it was a long and extremely painful process. Very early on, she did an exercise that brought about change: a nurse asked her to draw her body on a huge piece of paper. She then asked Virgo to lie down and traced around her actual body, to compare the two images. It was an absolutely arresting, unarguable demonstration of how warped her self-image was. “From that point on, I thought: ‘I’m just going to start having a little bit of food. Start to show that I’m complying with the programme.’”

Recovery may start with the intellect, but even the mightiest mind can’t just flick a switch. The days were structured around meals, snacks and talking therapies, with all the normal aspects of teenage life excised. Patients were “constantly competing, over how much food we were eating, around people’s weights. We’d all be queueing up outside the nurse’s room where they weighed you. As soon as that person walked out of the treatment room, you could see in their face what had happened with their weight, and that was really hard. They looked distressed whatever, but they’d look more distressed if it had gone up too much – too much for them.”



‘I’m trying to get people to understand that not all eating disorders are visible’ ... Hope Virgo. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

A new person being admitted was also a trial. “If you were further through the programme, you would be a heavier weight than them, and that was really hard.” At meal times, people would try to squirrel away food. It created an atmosphere of intense rivalries and resentments, only occasionally broken by a moment of solidarity, not necessarily in a good way.

“There was one time when we all clubbed together and stole bread from the kitchen. It was bread that had slightly more calories than the bread we normally had, and we got rid of it. That was the only time our eating disorders interacted as a team. Most of the time, they were constantly at loggerheads with each other.”

Nonetheless, Virgo did her A-levels at hospital and was discharged in time to go to the University of Birmingham to study sociology. It was an unbelievable trial, since she emerged from hospital entirely institutionalised, with very rigid rules around both the substance and timing of all meals and snacks. If she broke these rules there was the spectre of relapse.

She kept her cereal bowl from the unit with her, so she could be certain of the amount she was eating. Close friends got used to making sure they ate at 6pm. It was already a world away from her school life, pre-hospital, when she used elaborate avoidance strategies for any group meals, but it was still a slog. “You get to a healthy weight, then you’re discharged back out into the community, on an NHS hospital food plan. You still don’t really know how to eat and how to listen to your body. It’s weird; I used to watch people eat at university and think: ‘Why can’t I eat that?’”

The university years had their own extraneous shocks – her parents divorced in her first year, her grandmother died in her third year. But she weathered these events without relapse, emerging with a degree, a solid set of friends with whom she is still very close, a few half-marathons accomplished and a running habit that was intense but under control. It wasn’t until 2016, when she was 26 and living in London, that her eating disorder returned, triggered, she believes, by the death of her other grandmother. It was a few days after this grandparent had moved into a care home, and Virgo had been to see her. “I didn’t really want to be there. I think I stayed for an hour, max, and I

remember feeling really guilty for leaving, but convinced myself that I could come back the week after and it'd be fine," she says.



Knocking at the door ... Hope Virgo (*second from right*) at Downing Street in 2019 with the #DumpTheScales petition and campaign supporters (*from left*) Andrew Mitchell, TV presenter Sean Fletcher, Wera Hobhouse MP and Tatjana Trposka. Photograph: Courtesy of Hope Virgo

Instead, she spiralled back into her old behaviours. When they became impossible to ignore, she sought psychiatric help but didn't qualify for it, because her weight wasn't low enough. This is, initially, what drove her to begin Dump the Scales.

There are a lot of people who have a really unhealthy relationship with food and exercise, and we just accept that it's fine. That normalises it. I have to keep saying: 'It's not fine'

[People with eating disorders in England denied help as 'BMI not low enough'](#)

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The recovery Virgo describes is a complicated one: until a couple of years ago, if she was going out to dinner with friends, her boyfriend would have to

call ahead “to see what they were serving, maybe pre-empt some of the conversations, say: ‘Can we not talk about calories, can we not talk about weight loss?’ I’ve also had to learn, had to remember, that my needs aren’t ahead of his, even though I’ve got a diagnosed mental health issue.”

The pandemic was a catastrophe for many people with eating disorders, as subtle but important routines – which way to go round a supermarket, which brand of yoghurt to buy – were upturned. And, in tandem, everyone seemed to go on a diet simultaneously. There will always be bad days. But this is what recovery looks like, and Virgo wants society to see it, and believe it.

In the UK, [Beat](#) can be contacted on 0808-801-0677. In the US, the [National Eating Disorders Association](#) is on 800-931-2237. In Australia, the [Butterfly Foundation](#) is at 1800 33 4673. Other international helplines can be found at [Eating Disorder Hope](#)

In the UK, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org. You can contact the mental health charity Mind by calling 0300 123 3393 or visiting mind.org.uk

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My summer of loveRelationships

My summer of love: ‘As a practising Muslim, my soulmate checklist didn’t include lapsed-Catholics covered in tattoos’

There was certainly chemistry between us on our first meeting. But when we met for our first date, he had a big surprise ...



Remona Aly ... ‘To this day, I still can’t believe he liked me.’ Composite: Remona Ally/Getty

Remona Aly ... ‘To this day, I still can’t believe he liked me.’ Composite: Remona Ally/Getty



[Remona Aly](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

About five years ago, I had an unsolicited romance with a guy who was the exact opposite of what I'd been looking for.

I was in the north of England to attend a weekend symposium with creatives from all over the world. After a five-hour train journey, I arrived at the hotel, ready to hide in my room with a cuppa in an undersized mug, when I was told that I was expected at an opening night dinner. I was ushered to the foyer of a grand ballroom where women in glittering gowns and men in sharp suits swanned around me. Not-so-fresh from my travels, I was still dressed in a beige cardigan and crummy trainers.

I quickly found my table and announced: "Hi, I'm Remona, and I didn't get the memo!" to the other guests. Through the candelabra and foliage, I spotted someone grinning at me: a confident, attractive, 6ft-tall Canadian, whose tattoos popped from under his sleeves – along with a giant sign on his head saying: "Off limits." As a practising Muslim, my soulmate checklist has always specified a man who shares my faith; someone kind, with integrity and who uses a *lota* (the Asian version of a bidet – being squeaky clean for prayer is a biggie for many Muslims). My ideal partner was

certainly not a *lota*-less lapsed Catholic covered in tats – not that I thought a handsome, non-Muslim guy would look twice at me, either.

To this day, I still can't believe he liked me – not just because there were so many gorgeous women there that night, but also because I asked the waiters to serve the two empty spaces that didn't show up so that I could dive into three melon starters, one and a half dinners and a medley of desserts. Somehow, he found this very amusing.

He moved to sit closer to me, and we chatted. He was intelligent, charming and attentive and, despite myself, I felt the chemistry. The next morning, as I was plating up at breakfast, I heard a voice mutter: "I hear the melon is really good here."

I was not used to this. To put it in context, the last guy I had been set up with by a well-meaning aunt asked if I was willing to give up work to look after his mother. For the past 13 years, the search for a romantic partner had involved a rotating skewer of dismal coffees and life-sucking dating sites. I was in my mid-30s – considered "left on the shelf" by many Muslim men, for whom I was not young or pretty enough. Or too religious. Or not religious enough. While I also turned down unwanted offers, whenever I had liked a Muslim guy, they would leg it in the opposite direction.

And yet here was this self-assured Canadian, continuing to pay me attention, seeking me out at mealtimes, being respectful of my Muslim sensibilities – it turns out he knew a fair bit about [Islam](#) – never crossing any physical boundaries and keeping the flirting subtle. The symposium was coming to a close, and, as I said my goodbyes, he very smoothly asked me to dinner. I was flustered; I had never ever been asked out on a date like this.

Because he had been brave enough to ask a hijabi woman out, because of his kindness and because, more significantly, I gleaned a faint glimmer of hope from friends whose non-Muslim fiances had genuinely loved Islam and ended up converting, I took him up on his offer. Jane Austen was surely talking about single Muslim women when she wrote: "A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony, in a moment."

Yet, I was still in a dilemma. “It’s just dinner, not a marriage contract,” a friend said. “Just bring me back a son-in-law!” said my mum. “But what would people think?” I asked her. “Don’t worry about them,” she replied. “None of those people will be there for you when you’re on your own.”

A few weeks later, I walked towards the restaurant, nervous, doubting, hopeful. I asked God for a sign to propel me into destiny – or get me the heck out of it. We had already postponed the date by a week as he’d had to travel abroad urgently, so I casually asked how his trip went. “Well, actually,” he said, “I just found out I’ve become a father.” My jaw dropped into the guacamole starter. His ex-girlfriend had been in touch with the big news.

Maybe I was a coward, maybe I was smart, but I took that as my sign. It meant that my one and only date with a non-Muslim didn’t go anywhere, but it did teach me to be bolder, be open to risk – and maybe re-examine my priority about a *lota*.

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Hacking

Who's behind the Kaseya ransomware attack – and why is it so dangerous?

The breach has affected hundreds of businesses around the world, and experts fear the worst is yet to come



Kaseya has said between Photograph: Andre M Chang/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Kaseya has said between Photograph: Andre M Chang/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Kari Paul in San Francisco

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Hackers last week infiltrated a Florida-based information technology firm and deployed a ransomware attack, seizing troves of data and demanding \$70m in payment for its return.

The hack of the Kaseya firm, which is already [being called](#) “the biggest ransomware attack on record”, has affected hundreds of businesses globally,

including supermarkets in Sweden and schools in New Zealand.

In the aftermath of the attack, cybersecurity teams are scrambling to regain control of the stolen data while the Biden administration is mulling potential diplomatic responses. Here's what you need to know about the attack, its impact, and what's next.

What happened and what makes this hack particularly bad?

Hackers infiltrated Kaseya, accessed its customers' data, and demanded ransom for the data's return. Making the hack particularly grave, experts say, is that Kaseya is what is known as a "managed service provider". That means its systems are used by companies too small or modestly resourced to have their own tech departments. Kaseya regularly pushes out updates to its customers meant to ensure the security of their systems. But in this case, those safety features were subverted to push out malicious software to customers' systems.

[How remote work opened the floodgates to ransomware](#)

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This hack was particularly egregious because the bad actors behind it had targeted the very systems typically used to protect customers from malicious software, said Doug Schmidt, a professor of computer science at Vanderbilt University.

"This is very scary for a lot of reasons – it's a totally different type of attack than what we have seen before," Schmidt said. "If you can attack someone through a trusted channel, it's incredibly pervasive – it's going to ricochet way beyond the wildest dreams of the perpetrator."

Who was affected?

Kaseya has said that between 800 and 1,500 businesses were affected by the hack, although independent researchers [have pegged](#) the figure at closer to 2,000. There are at least 145 victims in the US, according to an outside

analysis from Sophos Labs, including local and state governments and agencies as well as small and medium-sized businesses.

Joe Biden said on Tuesday that while a number of smaller US businesses like dentists' offices or accountants might have felt the effects of the hack, not many domestic companies had been affected.

"It appears to have caused minimal damage to US businesses, but we're still gathering information," Biden told reporters following a briefing from advisers. "I feel good about our ability to be able to respond."

Meanwhile, the impact has reached other continents, and the disruption has been felt more keenly in other countries. In Sweden, hundreds of supermarkets had to close when their cash registers were rendered inoperative and in [New Zealand](#), many schools and kindergartens were knocked offline.

Who is behind the hack?

Affiliates of the Russian hacker group REvil have claimed responsibility for the attack. REvil is the group that in June unleashed a major [ransomware attack](#) on the meat producer JBS, crippling the company and its supply until it paid a \$11m ransom.

REvil has quickly become a huge operation, offering "ransomware as a service" – meaning it leases out its ability to extort companies to other criminals and keeps a percentage of each payment. Its business operates at scale, offering customer service hotlines to allow its victims to pay ransoms more easily.

What happens next?

Kaseya's chief executive officer, Fred Voccolla, told Reuters he could not confirm whether Kaseya would pay the \$70m ransom or negotiate with the hackers for a lower cost: "No comment on anything to do with negotiating with terrorists in any way," he said.

If the ransom were paid, it could exacerbate a ransomware arms race, said Schmidt. When hackers were successful, he said, they accrued more financial resources, enabling them to acquire better equipment, improved operations, and more skilled hackers.

“When hackers are assured they are going to get paid, and not going to get caught, they get a lot more brazen,” he said. “We are going to see a major, major escalation in these kinds of attacks. This is going to get a lot worse.”

In addition to the attacks by REvil on Kaseya and JBS in recent weeks, another Russia-linked group in May attacked the US fuel transporter Colonial Pipeline. It was [revealed on Tuesday](#) that the US Republican National Committee may have been affected by a breach carried out by yet another Russia-based hacking collective.

As attacks escalate, the Biden administration has discussed its domestic and international responses. The White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said in a press conference on Tuesday that Biden would meet with officials from the departments of justice, state and homeland security and the intelligence community on Wednesday to discuss ransomware and US efforts to counter it.

She also said that senior US officials would meet their Russian counterparts next week to discuss the ransomware problem.

“As the president made clear to President Putin when they met, if the Russian government cannot or will not take action against criminal actors in Russia, we will take action or reserve the right,” she said.

Reuters contributed to this report

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[Documentary films](#)

Dogcams and dark forests: how The Truffle Hunters captured a beautiful, dangerous world

Poisoned bait, clandestine missions, top secret locations ... we meet the directors of a film about the extraordinary Italians who forage for a delicacy that's worth thousands



The elusive fungus ... white Alba truffles have resisted all of modern science's efforts at cultivation. Photograph: Entertainment Pictures/Alamy

The elusive fungus ... white Alba truffles have resisted all of modern science's efforts at cultivation. Photograph: Entertainment Pictures/Alamy

[Phil Hoad](#)
[@phlode](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Anyone looking for an antidote to digital overload could do worse than spend 90 minutes in the company of some Piedmontese villagers as they root through leaf litter in search of their region's own treasure: the white truffle. It's this simplicity that makes new documentary [The Truffle Hunters](#) such a balm. With no voiceover, this mesmerically shot film follows a handful of foragers, and their dogs, as they scour the northern Italian forests during winter for the elusive fungus.

"That's why we made this film," says co-director Gregory Kershaw. "To escape from our digital lives and spend time in a place like this. You realise how many things that are so important to human existence are missing from our daily lives. Like what it means to not think of nature as a wilderness to be explored, but to have it entwined with your daily life."

This synergy seems to work for the truffle hunters, who are mostly in their 70s and 80s. "They're all really healthy," says fellow director [Michael Dweck](#). "We didn't see any medication, nobody limping, no broken hips, nothing like that. And it was so dangerous [in the forests at night]."

Some hunters have left strychnine-laced bait for their rivals' dogs

Underlining their point about modern life, Dweck, Kershaw and I are imprisoned in little Zoom rectangles discussing the film, whose meditative flow somehow positions it perfectly for the lockdown era. Dweck, 63, a former advertising hotshot turned visual artist, has Sideshow Bob hair and a scratchy New Yorker's patter; Kershaw, 47, has a documentarian's background and is more collegial and clean-cut.

The pair independently stumbled on the locale, whose exact whereabouts in Piedmont they won't disclose, after both going on holiday there. Kershaw was struck by the "fairy-tale" ambience in all the hilltop villages, as well as a deep-rooted sense of community that hardened into "secrecy" where the [white Alba truffle](#) – which is nearly impossible to cultivate and worth thousands of euros per kilogram – was concerned. The hunters often make their rounds nocturnally to keep spots secret.

“It’s all done under the cover of night,” says Kershaw. “The brokers make deals with buyers in these back alleys. From day to day, no one knows what the price should be.” So fierce is the competition that some people have left [strychnine-laced bait for their rivals’ dogs](#).

Dweck and Kershaw spent three years penetrating this furtive world, until they were unobtrusive enough to capture its real rhythms. “It took the locals a while to understand what we were after,” says Dweck. “That we weren’t like a reality show, or there as journalists to expose a hidden world to tourists. It took time.” The patience explains the film’s luminous naturalism, with sequences including truffle-hunter Sergio singing in triumph in his jeep after a score, or 84-year-old Aurelio explaining to his cherished dog Birba what will happen to her after his death.

The directors tried to approach their shot set-ups like a “conversation”, as Kershaw puts it, with the locals – never forcing anything. Sometimes they would film an entire three-hour lunch, with the pair and the camera behind a black felt curtain, like wildlife photographers in a hide. They usually managed one shot a day; there are only 107 shots in the whole film (the average is more than 1,250).



Not to be truffled with ... two of the stars of the documentary. Photograph: Entertainment Pictures/Alamy

Their infiltration went down as far as hound's eye level. Occasionally breaking the classical scheme are "dogcam" sequences that, with just a wet nose in the frame, follow the canines coursing along forest paths after the truffle scent. Dweck and Kershaw fastened GoPro cameras to the dogs' heads using harnesses that, after several failed attempts, were finally designed by the village's cobbler. The footage they got back was revelatory, Kershaw says, in opening up the "oneness" between the truffle hunters and their dogs. Reviewing it, they realised the humans were using a unique dialect – which even their translator, who was from the region, didn't recognise – to talk to their animals. The interdependency between man and dog seems almost as profound as between truffle and tree.

['They killed my best friend for supper!' Gunda, the farmyard film that could put you off eating meat for ever](#)

[Read more](#)

Cracking opening hidden and endangered subcultures is the pair's specialty. "We're both obsessed with them," says Dweck. "But they're very difficult to find." The first film on which they worked together, [The Last Race](#), focused on Long Island's one remaining stock car-racing circuit, struggling not to be swallowed up by property development. In the case of The Truffle Hunters, modern capitalism is again the stressor – putting unsustainable demand on a delicate finite resource and threatening to rip apart the surrounding culture. For the handful of pensioners shepherding it, this transcends the obscene money changing hands in gastronomic circles far away. Angelo – a long-bearded, Rasputin-esque purist living in a dilapidated villa – loathes the corruption so much he has completely abjured truffle hunting for any reason.



Chiaroscuro interiors ... The Truffle Hunters. Photograph: Entertainment Pictures/Alamy

Dweck, though, is firm in his belief that “films are very powerful” and can protect such embattled corners. The attention *The Last Race* brought [Riverhead Raceway](#) encouraged the owners to sell to someone committed to keeping it open, and now the track is thriving. His plan to help safeguard Piedmontese truffle culture is twofold: a conservation effort to raise money to buy land on behalf of the locals, preventing deforestation of the oak trees on which the truffles grow; and an education initiative to bring up the next generation of truffle hunters, teaching them how to manage the delicate fungus lifecycle and the wider forest ecosystem.

Dweck wants to educate the audience, too. The film’s bracing landscapes and chiaroscuro interiors are designed, he says, to teach people “how to see again”; to lull us into fully experiencing this sylvan haven. Surely, though, cinema can never replicate the two senses most vital in the case of truffles – taste and smell? Dweck is undaunted. “We’re almost there. We’re really close. Like in the scene near the end where the truffle judge is eating the pasta. You start off with sound from the objective point of view, and he takes more and more bites, and you hear that opera, that 1926 recording of Caruso. And then you’re inside of his brain, with all of this pleasure consuming his body.”

I am sufficiently transported to beg a friend to introduce me to his truffle dealer in the Cévennes mountains near where I live in France. A few days later, I find myself handing him €63 – for one small mushroom. Small fry in truffle-land.

- The Truffle Hunters is out in cinemas on 9 July.
-

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[Walking holidays](#)

I will walk 500 miles ... on an art trail along the Suffolk and Essex coasts



A little tern's egg in its 'nest', a shallow scrape in the shingle on Kessingland Ness. Photograph: Kevin Rushby

A little tern's egg in its 'nest', a shallow scrape in the shingle on Kessingland Ness. Photograph: Kevin Rushby

An arts project hopes to bring people together by walking, and in offering the insight of local experts every step of the way

[Kevin Rushby](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

It's the little terns and the avocets that do the trick: convincing me that I've made the right decision to be here. I am walking along the shoreline when I stumble on a gang of RSPB volunteers, more particularly Karen, who points out the egg of a little tern, lying in the shingle, so fragile and delicate.

I would not have seen it. I might have stood on it. I certainly would have missed the avocets with their elegantly up-curved bills and their three

chicks. “We’re very excited,” says Karen, “We’ve never had them here before.”

[Map of Suffolk and Essex coasts in the UK.](#)

I’m at Kessingland Ness, a small spit of shingle on the Suffolk coast south of Lowestoft and I’m starting a long-distance walk, a real marathon. The plan is to walk the Suffolk and Essex coasts from Lowestoft to Tilbury, accompanying an arts project called [Beach of Dreams](#) that hopes to bring people together around walking, and start some discussion about what’s happening to our coasts. (As I write, we have reached Ipswich, a total of 120 miles, but the final tally will be 500 miles.)

I’ve been talking about long-distance walking for a long time, but not actually done very much of it

I’ve been talking and writing about long-distance walking for a long time, but not actually done much of it. Like many people during the pandemic, I wanted to get out on something significant, but given that challenges such as the Appalachian Trail or GR10 are off the agenda, I was thinking of the British coast, maybe that of Wales or south-west England. Then Ali Pretty, founder and artistic director of arts group Kinetika, suggested I accompany their walk and write [a daily account](#).



Walking on the coast south of Lowestoft. The spume is generated by algae in the water Photograph: Kevin Rushby

Since I knew almost nothing of the coasts of Suffolk and Essex, I was intrigued. Every section of the walk will be with local people who know their stretch intimately. I did have my doubts: isn't it all flat mud and bleak caravan sites? But despite that, I signed up.

On day three, I fall into step with [Colin Saunders](#), a veteran long-distance walker and the author of several guidebooks to trails around London, and also the High Tatra in central Europe. How does he prepare a long-distance walk?

“Decide where you want to start,” he says with a smile. “Then, how far you want to walk each day. Cut an appropriate length of string and pin it in the map at the start, then flick it out and see which routes might be possible. Then do it again for as many days as you have.”



Colin Saunders leads the way through dense Suffolk reed beds. Photograph: Kevin Rushby

Colin started his walking adventures in 1967 when the [Ramblers](#) organised rail day trips for hundreds of walkers, mostly young people. The outings were popular. “It was very different then,” he says. “Sometimes we would stop and dance, and we never carried any food or drink, relying totally on pubs, which usually only had beer and crisps – nuts if you were lucky!”

Colin found a group of friends who eventually became the Vanguards Rambling Club. “They’re like family now.” One favourite route from East Croydon station to Newhaven on the south coast became [the Vanguard Way](#), a long-established path that celebrates its 40th anniversary this year.



Colin Saunders inspecting one of the former atomic warfare research facilities on Orford Ness. Photograph: Kevin Rushby

“The great thing about it is that within a mile of East Croydon, you are in deep countryside and you stay there pretty much for all of the next 66 miles.”

At 78 years old and still clocking up about 1,000 miles a year, his hope is that younger people might find the same pleasure and camaraderie that he has enjoyed.



The writer has a rest on a random discovery – a rather handy sofa on the Suffolk coast. Photograph: Ali Pretty

At Orford we take the small ferry across to Orford Ness, which feels like an island but is actually an elongated peninsula of shingle where the Ministry of Defence performed military tests until the 1970s. Hares zigzag away from us across the habitat that is called vegetated shingle, an environment rarer than coral reefs, but just as colourful at this time of year with yellow horned poppies, purple sea peas and pink valerian.

Abandoned within this are the eerie concrete laboratories and bunkers where research into atomic weapons was done. Further down the coast we come to Shingle Street, a hamlet that feels lost in time, where each beach house has a rickety table of treasures retrieved from the waves and the foreshore is a riot of wildflowers. Every day spent on this coast is a discovery for me.



A table of foreshore treasures at Shingle Street. Photograph: Kevin Rushby

We walk up to Sutton Hoo where public rights of way mean you can freely reach the Royal Burial Ground's actual [boat burial site](#). We do so at 7am when far down the valley mist is curling off the River Deben. While the Suffolk coast has many treasures like this, plus celebrated towns such as Southwold and Aldeburgh, for me the real gems are the less well-known and unexpected: the tin houses and churches, the boat crossing from Bawdsey to Felixstowe Ferry, the many bird reserves, and the oak forests that line the River Orwell almost all the way to Ipswich.

Five miles before we get to that city, at the thatch-roofed [Ship Inn](#) in Levington, Colin lays into a large plate of curry and a pint of Adnams. “Things have improved in some ways,” he says, with a grin. “But I don’t do the rain dance like I used to.” We have a vast distance yet to cover, and my untrained feet are a mess, but inspired by Colin, I will keep going.

All the Beach of Dreams walks [can be found here](#)

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Olympic torch

There is a light that sometimes goes out: the Olympic torch protests

A woman attempted to extinguish the torch's flame in Japan with a squirt gun – and she's far from the first to stage a protest during the torch relay



The Olympic flame is displayed on a cauldron at a Tokyo 2020 Olympics torch relay event in Yokohama. Photograph: Yoshio Tsunoda/AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

The Olympic flame is displayed on a cauldron at a Tokyo 2020 Olympics torch relay event in Yokohama. Photograph: Yoshio Tsunoda/AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

Harron Walker

Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Are you kind of, sort of, not really into the fact that the Olympics are still going to happen later this month in Tokyo despite the coronavirus pandemic and the fact that the vast majority of our planet's 7.8 billion people remain unvaccinated, with alarming outbreaks cropping up worldwide?

If so, you've got a friend in Kayoko Takahashi.

According to the [Tokyo Reporter](#), the 53-year-old woman from Hitachi attempted to extinguish the flame of the Olympic torch as it passed through Mito en route to Japan's capital on Sunday by shooting at it with a squirt gun.

“We are opposed to the Olympics!” she can be heard shouting in a video that has since gone viral on social media as she takes aim at the torch. “Stop the Olympics!”

液体発射何かなって見たら、水鉄砲でオリンピック反対する女性でした。 pic.twitter.com/NQx9o4Ls9O

— ♡ ♡ **Parieru** 60 (@parieruchan) [July 4, 2021](#)

Apparently, Takahashi's opposition [stems](#) from the fact that only 14% of Japan's population has been fully vaccinated against Covid-19.

Her efforts to extinguish the flame ultimately proved unsuccessful, though she was arrested for “deliberately aiming at the runner [carrying the torch] and interfering with the relay”, Noriaki Nagatsuka, Mito's deputy chief of police, told Vice News.

In Takahashi's defense, it's actually hard to put out an [Olympic torch](#). (Unless you're a literal rainstorm, like the one at the 1976 Montreal games that managed to put out the entire gigantic flame in the stadium.) Many have attempted to do just that, though! And often for political reasons. Others have taken advantage of the torch's far-reaching media visibility to stage other kinds of protests while leaving the flame itself alone. Here are some notable examples from the past few decades.

Rio de Janeiro

As the Olympic torch relay entered its final stretch on the way to Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 games, a young man [hurled a bucket of water](#) at it in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to extinguish it.

Angra dos Reis, Brazil

The man was not the only one who attempted to put out the torch in the lead-up to the 2016 games in Brazil. As the flame passed through Angra dos Reis, a group of striking teachers – furious at Rio’s state government for funding the Olympics while not paying them for a two months – seized upon it, successfully [putting it out](#) as part of their protest.

Voronezh, Russia

Two years earlier on the torch relay to Sochi, a gay rights activist [attempted to wave a rainbow flag](#) as the flame passed through Voronezh, presumably to call attention the Russian state oppression of LGBTQ+ people. He was tackled and detained by police for doing so.

London

As the Olympic torch passed through London on the way to the 2008 games in Beijing, a protester [unsuccessfully tried to put it out](#) using a literal fire extinguisher.

Paris

French protesters [succeeded](#) where that fire extinguisher fan failed, though, successfully extinguishing the flame at least three times in an effort to call attention to the Chinese government’s record of human rights abuses in occupied Tibet.

Juneau, Alaska

And finally, we have ... bong hits for Jesus? Yep! [Bong hits for Jesus](#). In 2002, an Alaska high school student held up a banner advocating “BONG HITS 4 JESUS” on the side of the Olympic torch relay as it cut through Juneau on the way to Salt Lake City. His 10-day suspension gave way to a

first amendment legal battle, culminating with a 2007 supreme court ruling in favor of school administrators.

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So happy to see you: our brains respond emotionally to faces we find in inanimate objects, study reveals

University of Sydney researchers find humans detect and react to illusory faces in the same way they do real faces



A happy grater in the kitchen. Researchers say seeing faces in inanimate objects is common. Photograph: Paul David Galvin/Getty Images

A happy grater in the kitchen. Researchers say seeing faces in inanimate objects is common. Photograph: Paul David Galvin/Getty Images

*[Donna Lu](#)
[@donnadlu](#)*

Tue 6 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

Whether in a cloud, the front of a car, or a [\\$28,000 toasted sandwich](#) supposedly resembling the Virgin Mary, seeing faces in inanimate objects is a common experience.

According to new research by the University of Sydney, our brains detect and respond emotionally to these illusory faces the same way they do to real human faces.

Face pareidolia – seeing faces in random objects or patterns of light and shadow – is an everyday phenomenon. Once considered a [symptom of psychosis](#), it arises from an error in visual perception.

[Objects are people too: the quirky world of facial pareidolia – in pictures](#)

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Lead researcher Prof David Alais, of the University of Sydney, said human brains are evolutionarily hardwired to recognise faces, with highly specialised brain regions for facial detection and processing.



A concrete pipe lid in Tokyo, Japan, above. Below: the window pattern on a corrugated metal building. Photograph: kanonnightsky/Getty Images/iStockphoto



Photograph: Steve Cicero/Getty Images

“We are such a sophisticated social species and face recognition is very important,” Alais said. “You need to recognise who it is, is it family, is it a friend or foe, what are their intentions and emotions?

“Faces are detected incredibly fast. The brain seems to do this... using a kind of template-matching procedure, so if it sees an object that appears to have two eyes above a nose above a mouth, then it goes, ‘Oh I’m seeing a face.’”

“It’s a bit fast and loose and sometimes it makes mistakes, so something that resembles a face will often trigger this template match.”

The researchers showed people a sequence of faces – a jumble of both real faces and pareidolia images – and had participants rate each facial expression on a scale between angry and happy.

The researchers found that inanimate objects had a similar emotional priming effect to real faces.

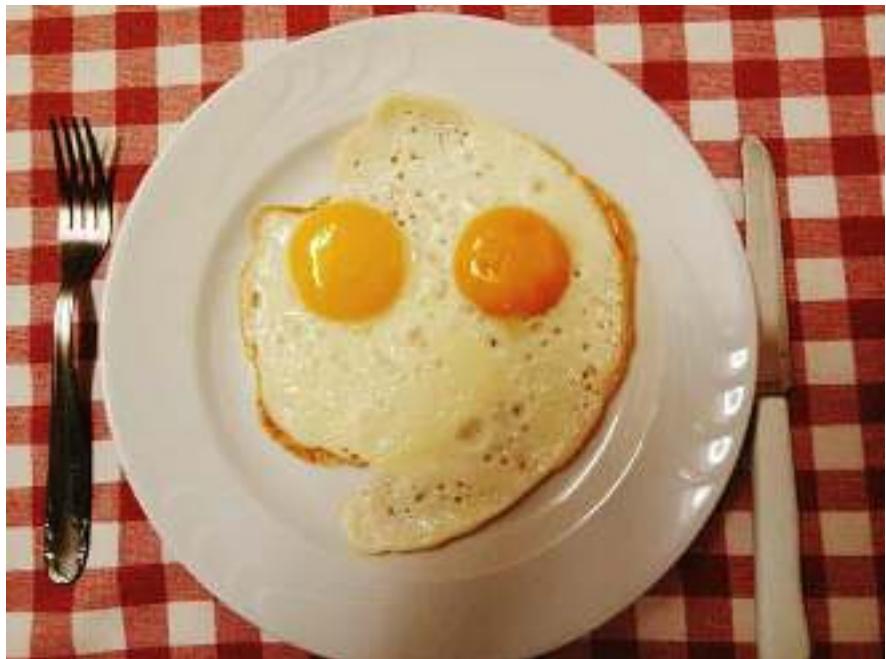


A piece of whole wheat bread. Below: A towel dispenser in a public bathroom that appears to be smiling.

Photograph: PhotoAlto/Laurence Mouton/Getty Images



Photograph: photo by Dave Gorman/Getty Images



Our brains detect and respond emotionally to these illusory faces the same way they do to real human faces. Photograph: Lorenzo Cerioni/Getty Images/EyeEm

“What we found was that actually these pareidolia images are processed by the same mechanism that would normally process emotion in a real face,” Alais said.

“You are somehow unable to totally turn off that face response and emotion response and see it as an object. It remains simultaneously an object and a face.”

The study may help to inform research in artificial intelligence or disorders of facial processing such as prosopagnosia, he said.

Earlier research co-authored by Alais showed that in judging a series of faces, the perception of a person’s appearance was biased by the preceding image shown. “If the previous one was attractive, they rated the current one more attractively,” Alais said.



‘You are somehow unable to totally turn off that face response and emotion response and see it as an object.’ Photograph: Carol Haynes/Getty Images/EyeEm

“This also happens with expression,” he said. “If you see a happy face previously, the next face will be rated slightly happier.”

The latest study was published in the peer-reviewed journal [Proceedings of the Royal Society B.](#)

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With Johnson driving, it doesn't feel like we've reached the end of the Covid line

[Marina Hyde](#)



The government wants us to take responsibility, but isn't so keen on giving us the data we need to make informed decisions

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‘The prime minister simply cannot be straight with people that this is a gamble.’ Boris Johnson at Monday’s Covid press conference. Photograph: Reuters

‘The prime minister simply cannot be straight with people that this is a gamble.’ Boris Johnson at Monday’s Covid press conference. Photograph: Reuters

Tue 6 Jul 2021 08.18 EDT

Sixteen months ago we probably would have rolled our eyes at being told to take “personal responsibility” by [Boris Johnson](#), a man who doesn’t even take personal responsibility for an unspecified number of his own kids. But that was then, and these days we just have to let it wash over us like a waterfall in a shampoo advert.

There was certainly a powerful cascade of it all on Monday, as the prime minister explained that it was [now or never for opening up](#). Faced with that false opposition, who wouldn’t pick “now”? I am hugely into “now” as the moment where it all goes away, and we return to a prelapsarian world where the government that got pretty much all of it wrong, pretty much all the way through, simply gets out of our lives. The only nagging worry, I suppose, is the possibility that the government that got pretty much all of it wrong is

getting this bit of it wrong too, and that that means they're going to be right up in our business again come the autumn.

Not that I don't want my hot firebreak summer. I'm afraid I'm the personality type that hears the government's new buzz phrase "summer firebreak" and reflexively thinks: right, I need to have THE best summer firebreak possible. I want to be drinking Summer Firebreaks; I want to tear the summer firebreak pants out of it. And when it all goes tits up and I'm staring down the barrel of autumn restrictions/civic mutiny, I'm going to write an elegiac song about how amazing it all was now it's gone, probably called Summer Firebreak. A bit like Don Henley's Boys of Summer, but with even more Wayfarers.

Wherever you stand on my summer firebreak dreams – you may well be absolutely tutting at them – I suspect I am not entirely alone in the sentiment. Which made it even more absurd to hear Johnson solemnly intoning: "This is not a moment to get demob happy." Oh come on. Have you ever met people? Especially English people, the people to whom your supposedly sobering statements apply? This is a bit like the time last September, when boffins and Dido Harding alike were seemingly blindsided by the wholly predictable explosion in testing demand once schools and universities returned. Why are they like this? Why are they constantly surprised by the real world?

Anyway, Monday evening's big announcement took place in Downing Street's £2.9m briefing room, which has since its very inception felt like a doomed way of raising the tone of what's going on inside it. For a gambler with Johnson's Covid success rate, it's like putting on a tuxedo to go down the bookies and blowing the housekeeping. Needless to say, the room remains otherwise empty. Once journalists can turn up in person to this facility after 19 July, I imagine there suddenly won't be any more press conferences, in an eerie instance of Jungian synchronicity. Likewise, the return of full parliamentary democracy – suspended to the huge detriment of absolutely everyone bar the government – will take place just three days before parliament dissolves for summer recess. Funny how scrutiny keeps working out. Luckily, the government keeps promising this 19 July date is "a terminus", so there is no way it'll all get shut down again soon after they return for autumn.

And yet, IS it a terminus? With the exception of a very small number of weirdos who seem to subconsciously enjoy the dreary drama of the Covid era, we all obviously hope so. But the answer, at best, seems “unlikely”. Either way, and even after all his broken pandemic promises thus far, there is something mesmerising about Johnson’s inability to tell the unvarnished truth about that at this stage. The prime minister simply cannot be straight with people that this is a gamble. Despite all his earlier overpromising and underdelivering, he is still wanging on about a terminus and irreversibility – still writing cheques he might well not be able to cash. Johnson likes being a hostage to fortune so much I think he has Stockholm syndrome.

For me, the most troubling part of the press conference was the moment the chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance declined to directly answer a sensible question about what the modelling on hospitalisations and deaths showed. Johnson, of course, was far too cowardly to take up the baton and answer either. But why? Why are we not allowed to know the answer to that now? Why is that data secret, until at least next week? You can’t tell people to take responsibility then demonstrate that you think them too stupid or whatever to have all the available information to do so. But the government’s official policy is clearly obscurantist – asked again on Tuesday morning about what the modelling showed, [Sajid Javid would only say](#): “We have a number of models we look at internally.”

Presumably one of their favourite models to look at is entitled “Unmasked Ball”, because the bizarre decision to start some destructive row about mask-wearing must be also rooted in some sort of perceived positive outcome for them. I fear the damage here has already been done, but it really needn’t have been like this. Unfortunately, this is an administration that always tends toward over-emotionalism when being simply matter-of-fact would do.

[Sajid Javid, the TSB of health secretaries, arrives and says ‘yes’ to everything](#)

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As for the notion that power is about to be voluntarily surrendered by the government, and humbly handed back to the people ... that feels a little too convenient, in such exceptional circumstances. Johnson can go on about personal responsibility all he likes, but he’s going to have to take some

himself. What unfolds over the next few weeks and months must be on the leader, not the people he leads. Individuals can only do so much, and the problem has never been with people's lack of belief in things the prime minister said. People wanted to believe Johnson's promise we would "flatten the curve" in 12 weeks; people wanted to believe it would be "back to normal by Christmas"; people wanted to believe Christmas would be "saved" by Johnson; people wanted to believe jabs meant we could be back to normal by Easter; and people quite understandably now want to believe his promise all this is "irreversible" and that 19 July is a "terminus". So that's what he tells them.

And so it is that there are masses of normal people – who quite understandably don't spend half their lives being extremely online about politics – who now think that 19 July is absolutely a terminus. Quite how they'll react down the line if it turns out not to be is anyone's guess. I do wonder if it might not have been better, even for Johnson's own political fortunes, to at least warn people that the terminus might not turn out to be the terminus at all.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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Opinion Women

Amber Heard has had a baby – and proved an important point

Arwa Mahdawi



The actor is part of a growing trend for women to choose to become single mothers, a choice that represents genuine progress



“I wanted to do it on my own terms” ... Amber Heard in the photograph she posted on Instagram. Photograph: @amberheard/Instagram

“I wanted to do it on my own terms” ... Amber Heard in the photograph she posted on Instagram. Photograph: @amberheard/Instagram

Wed 7 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Amber Heard [has had a baby](#) girl. “Who cares?” you might ask. Ordinarily, not me. However, while strangers reproducing isn’t top of the lists of things I normally think about, the actor’s baby announcement got my attention because she is part of what seems to be a growing trend of women becoming single mothers by choice. Heard is in a relationship with the cinematographer Bianca Butti, but is reportedly the sole legal parent of her daughter and decided to get pregnant before meeting Butti.

“Four years ago, I decided I wanted to have a child,” Heard wrote in an [Instagram post](#) on Thursday. “I wanted to do it on my own terms. I now appreciate how radical it is for us as women to think about one of the most fundamental parts of our destinies in this way. I hope we arrive at a point in which it’s normalised to not want a ring in order to have a crib.”

It’s sad, but Heard is right: there is still something newsworthy about a woman choosing to have a child on her own terms instead of waiting around

for the right man to come along and bless her with sperm. That is changing though. Statistics point to an increase in the number of IVF cycles undertaken by single women in the UK, and celebrities such as the musician Natalie Imbruglia have helped to normalise women conceiving alone.

Of course, fertility treatments are expensive, and choosing to have a child alone is not something everyone can afford to do. I also don't want to act like choosing to have a kid on your "own terms" is automatically some kind of radical feminist act. Paid surrogacy, for example – increasingly popular among celebrities – can bring up complicated ethical issues. Still, like Heard, I hope society progresses to a point where it is totally normal "to not want a ring in order to have a crib". Perhaps more ambitiously, I hope we progress to a point where women aren't expected to automatically want to get married or have babies in the first place. Now wouldn't that be radical?

Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist.

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Liberalise planning rules to fix a housing crisis – sounds logical, but it won't work

[Anna Minton](#)

Restrictions are not the main barrier to housebuilding in Britain – so why is the government so set on loosening them?



‘Repeated government reviews and politicians from both parties have consistently identified “land banking” rather than a restrictive planning system as the key barrier to supply-side solutions.’ Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

‘Repeated government reviews and politicians from both parties have consistently identified “land banking” rather than a restrictive planning system as the key barrier to supply-side solutions.’ Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

Tue 6 Jul 2021 08.39 EDT

If the price of food had increased at the same rate as house prices in the UK over the past 50 years, then today a chicken would cost just under £70. As average house prices in London are more than twice as high as the rest of the country, in the capital that chicken would cost almost £140.

The government response to soaring inflation is to promise to build more homes at speed by loosening the planning system. It is a “supply side” solution, which sounds logical: rapidly increase the number of homes being built and prices will inevitably come down. It is a highly contentious approach, which cost the Conservatives the Chesham and Amersham byelection, but it sounds as if it should work.

The problem is that the housing market does not function like a pure market, and while the UK does have some of the highest prices in the world the affordability crisis is not a peculiarly British issue; it’s a global problem, with an index by the property consultants Knight Frank revealing that global residential prices have risen by more than 60% in the past 10 years.

Cities around the world, from Auckland to Vancouver, are facing an affordability crisis, with huge price rises and extreme gentrification in cities linked to global capital flows and foreign investment rather than local circumstances. This ensures that increased supply will not bring prices down; the new luxury apartment complexes that now characterise British cities such as London, Manchester, Bristol and York, to name but a few, remain out of reach for the majority of house buyers. Many are sold “off plan”, straight to foreign investors, before they have even been built.

The flood of global capital into cities followed the financial crisis and has been driven by low or negative interest rates, the growing dominance of global private equity in real estate and quantitative easing, the policy of creating trillions of pounds of electronic money pursued by the Bank of England, the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank. In the UK £445bn was created between 2009 and 2016, which went disproportionately into the hands of the richest, who ploughed it disproportionately into property. Between March and November 2020, a further £450bn was funnelled into the economy, which is predicted to have a similarly distorting effect on the housing market.

The irony is that while house prices have soared around the world, they are generally left out of central banks' calculations on inflation. In the UK, food, clothes, furniture, cars and holidays are all included in the government's preferred inflation index, the consumer price index (CPI), but house prices are not. The European Central Bank is looking at measuring the role of housing in the rising cost of living in a forthcoming strategic policy review, but there is little likelihood of the UK doing the same.

This is the global context for our extreme housing crisis, which is further fuelled by local circumstances. Chief among these are a private sector lacking incentives to produce more housing, and a social housing sector that builds very limited amounts of social and affordable housing. Margaret Thatcher's defining policy of "[right to buy](#)", under which more than [2m council homes](#) were sold, continues to decimate the dwindling amount of affordable housing in England, although Scotland and Wales have halted the policy. [In 1978](#), the year before Thatcher came to power, the government built 100,000 council homes, the private sector built 150,000 and there was no shortage of housing. Since then, private sector housebuilding figures have failed to make up the shortfall despite repeated policy incentives, such as [starter homes](#), which have contributed to a limited rise in building but added further inflationary pressures by increasing mortgage credit.

Housebuilders are businesses accountable to their shareholders, and it is well documented that it is not in their interests to flood the market with homes, as it would damage their profits. Instead they control the rate of production and trickle out limited numbers of homes from large developments to keep prices high. As a result, repeated government reviews and politicians from both parties have consistently identified "[land banking](#)" rather than a restrictive planning system as the key barrier to supply-side solutions. There is also little incentive to build high-quality, larger homes, leaving the UK with some of the [smallest homes in Europe](#), with the most attractive sites for developers in city centres suited to small luxury apartment developments that generate high income.

If there is widespread recognition that the planning system is not the main barrier, why are the government's reforms so focused on loosening restrictions? This is partly because it's a voter friendly idea outside of the Tory shires and popular with free-market Conservatives, while the

interventionist policies required to genuinely affect house price inflation are seen as ideologically unpalatable.

Canada and New Zealand, which have witnessed some of the fastest house price rises in the world, have introduced policies to dampen demand from foreign investors. Canada has proposed a new tax on foreign investors and restrictions on mortgage credit, while New Zealand has instructed its Reserve Bank to [consider house prices](#) in making monetary policy decisions. Solutions involving the public sector are equally hard to envisage, such as a public housing programme or large-scale new housing developments enabled by the municipal purchase of land, which underpinned the creation of the postwar new towns and remains the European model for development.

[Nimbys are not selfish. We're just trying to stop the destruction of nature | Ros Coward](#)
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The chief obstacle, which is also widely acknowledged in policy circles, is that there is no real desire for property prices to fall as housing investment has a direct bearing on GDP, economic growth and confidence in the economy. The paradox is that millions of individuals and families under the age of 45 may be excluded from the housing market, but millions of older voters inclined to vote Conservative stand to gain from an ever-appreciating asset.

The growing consensus is that the planning bill is [unlikely to survive](#) in its current form as it is so unpopular with swathes of Conservative MPs in vulnerable shire constituencies. The result is planning reforms that were unlikely to make a substantive difference in the first place are likely to be significantly watered down. In this way, a government claiming to liberalise the planning system can appeal to its free-market wing, while also appeasing the no-development lobby in the shires. It may be clever politics, which produces a lot of noise about the need to build, but it obscures the causes of the housing crisis instead of addressing them.

- Anna Minton is the author of *Big Capital: Who is London For?* and reader in architecture at the University of East London

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It may be slow, but retro TV has been a lifeline during lockdown

[Alex Clark](#)

The plots of Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy and Enemy at the Door take time, but they're worth it



Alec Guinness in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. ‘It uses silence to impeccably devastating effect, but is almost impossible to imagine being made now.’
Photograph: Allstar/BBC/Sportsphoto Ltd/Allstar

Alec Guinness in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. ‘It uses silence to impeccably devastating effect, but is almost impossible to imagine being made now.’
Photograph: Allstar/BBC/Sportsphoto Ltd/Allstar

Wed 7 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Here in the sticks, the continuation of lockdown is inducing ever more grandiose and recherché forms of fantasy: now, I fancy myself to have something of Joan Didion and Patti Smith about me as I sit and watch the television in the evenings. Sadly, the similarity is confined to what, in my

childhood, was called the idiot box, but which I now regard as a portal to somewhere other than the surrounding lanes and fields. [Didion](#), I remember, as I binge-watch episodes of dramas and comedies excavated from the past by genius cultural magpies such as archive specialists [Talking Pictures](#), spent a whole summer watching the prisoner-of-war saga Tenko; Patti Smith is a fan of Midsomer Murders and other cosies which, while recently made, might as well be relics from a bygone age for all they seem to draw on contemporary life.

It's been an odd week to complete a rewatch of the late 1970s ITV serial Enemy at the Door, which centres on the relationships between the German forces and the people of Guernsey during the occupation of the Channel Islands in the second world war. The deranged cultural commodification of the period as it is still applied to particular [national football fixtures](#) is utterly at odds with the painstaking moral explorations of the programme, in which the line between cooperation and collaboration is constantly being tested. We are now as far away in time from its making as Enemy at the Door was from the war itself, and yet we seem to understand the past even less clearly.

Over the course of 26 episodes – it was cancelled after its second series and stops abruptly, with very few storylines brought to fruition and German boots still marching through St Peter port – it portrayed a life of extreme deprivation, in which the islanders, represented by a doctor unenviably charged with liaising with the Nazis, boiled up blackberry leaves for tea, surrendered their radios, bicycles and livestock, and attempted to reconcile themselves to having been, to all intents and purposes, abandoned by the UK government.

[Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy: 40 years on, the labyrinthine thriller is still TV caviar](#)

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Its human interest derives from two key elements. First, there is the tension between German officers, specifically the humane, intellectual Major Richter, exceptionally played by Alfred Burke, and the ambitious, ruthless SS officer Reinicke, played by Simon Cadell, who the same year the programme finished would delight viewers as the prim head of a holiday camp in Hi-De-Hi! And then come the often tragic consequences of the

islanders' attempts at either resistance or accommodation, most notably that of the doctor's daughter who accidentally kills a German soldier and subsequently suffers a mental breakdown. Throughout runs a single, insistent question: what does it truly mean to be at war with other human beings?

But there has also been viewing pleasure in watching the slow unfolding of a story, a vital part of which are its longueurs and occasional lack of incident. It's something that feels absent from the high-octane experience of much drama being made now, intensified by the instant reaction and hypothesising that follows on social media. It put me in mind of my reaction to the much-praised [Mare of Easttown](#) which, like many others, I gobbled down week by week, avid for resolution and the meting out of redemption and punishment. It was tremendously atmospheric, with terrific performances, but at the end, I found myself sadly ambivalent, overstimulated into mild detachment; being asked to care simultaneously about murdered and imprisoned young women, errant priests, marital breakdown, parental addiction and, inexplicably, Guy Pearce, had led me to care not enough about any of them.

I'm swimming against the tide, I know. I can't even get myself that worked up about Buckells; the brief furore over the [finale of Line of Duty](#) made an impression on me more as a spectacle – the working out of our feelings of proprietorship over cultural artefacts, over the investment of our precious leisure hours at a time when it's hard to spend them elsewhere – than as a true indicator of how much I cared about H. (Incidentally, James Nesbitt can't be dead. He's clearly coming back to bite you on the bum. Any fule kno that.)

Meanwhile, I'm firmly resisting the slide into purely retro box set action, lest I become a nightmare nostalgist. The essentially parodic joys of Succession and the unyielding grimness of Time help. Nonetheless, I've allowed myself the pitch-perfect dialogue of the recently rebroadcast [Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy](#), a series that also uses silence to impeccably devastating effect, but which it is almost impossible to imagine being made now. In sitcom land, I have polished off the mania and melancholy of that paean to anti-capitalism, [The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin](#). I am considering drip-feeding myself episodes of the BBC's Secret Army, again from the late 1970s, again an exposition of compromise and corruption during wartime.

This is good, isn't it, I shall say to Joan Didion, as I pass her the custard creams.

- Alex Clark writes for the Observer and the Guardian
-

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[Opinion](#)[Donald Trump](#)

The Trump kids look likely to turn on their dad – and I suspect Ivanka will go first

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



The former president is not in immediate danger of jail, but his problems are piling up fast. Not least the fact that, in his family, loyalty means nothing



Melania Trump with Ivanka, Eric and Donald Jr in 2016. Photograph: Tasos Katopodis/AFP/Getty Images

Melania Trump with Ivanka, Eric and Donald Jr in 2016. Photograph: Tasos Katopodis/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 6 Jul 2021 12.14 EDT

Nothing in life is certain except death and rich people jumping through complicated hoops to avoid paying taxes. In case you needed any more convincing about the tax side of that, please see the latest travails of the Trumps.

On Thursday, the Trump Organization and its chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, [were charged with a “sweeping and audacious illegal payment scheme”](#) of tax-related crimes. While that may sound juicy, it is duller (but no less devious) when you dig into the 15-count indictment. There is no smoking gun, just mounds of details about company perks, such as payment of school fees and rents that weren’t reported properly. Lots of grubby ruses that add up to massive, and possibly illegal, tax savings.

Don’t mistake a lack of style for a lack of substance, however. The devil – and Donald Trump’s potential downfall – is in the detail. While it is unlikely that Trump (who is not facing criminal charges yet) is going to jail

imminently, Thursday's indictment may well mark the beginning of the end of his business empire. That end will come sooner rather than later if Weisselberg, who has worked for the Trump family for nearly 50 years, decides to turn against Trump and cooperate with the investigation. So far, Weisselberg seems loyal, but that could always change. Weisselberg's family, it is worth noting, aren't all as pro-Trump as he is. [Jennifer Weisselberg](#), his former daughter-in-law, has [handed over numerous financial documents](#) regarding her ex-husband, who was also a Trump Organization employee.

You think the Weisselbergs sound dysfunctional? Wait until the Trumps start turning on each other. It could be any day. On Thursday, Mary Trump, Donald's estranged niece, [told the cable news host Rachel Maddow](#) that she believes the former president's adult children won't think twice before sacrificing their father to save themselves. "His relationship with them, and their relationship with him, is entirely transactional and conditional," she said. "They're not going to risk anything for him, just as he wouldn't risk anything for them."

Trump's children, to be clear, haven't been charged with anything yet. However, they have a lot to be worried about. [As Donald Trump's biographer said recently](#), one reason Weisselberg is in trouble is that he was allegedly paid as an employee and a nonemployee contractor – allowing various tax write-offs. A [New York Times investigation](#) reported that Ivanka Trump was similarly paid more than \$700,000 (£500,000) in consulting fees while also collecting a salary as a full-time employee of the Trump Organization. It is likely Eric and Don Jr had similar arrangements in place – we only know for sure about Ivanka because she had to disclose the payments when she gave herself a job at the White House.

If any of the Trump kids are going to turn on their dad, my money is squarely on Ivanka. Indeed, she already seems to be distancing herself strategically from her no-longer-particularly-useful father. A couple of weeks ago, for example, there were reports that Trump's complaints about the "stolen" 2020 election [were driving Ivanka and Jared Kushner away](#). These reported leaks about Ivanka are not new phenomena – they happened frequently throughout Trump's presidency, [leading some to suspect it was a](#)

PR tactic by a couple keen to remain in the good graces of liberals as well as the Maga crowd.

While Ivanka appears to be coolly attempting to control her own narrative behind the scenes, Donald Jr and Eric reacted to the Trump Organization criminal charges by having histrionics on camera. Eric Trump told Newsmax last week that “Don, Ivanka and I live really nice, clean lives”. Meanwhile, Don Jr posted a 13-minute video on Facebook calling the charges against his dad “banana-republic stuff”. He also (rather unhelpfully) acknowledged that the allegations Trump paid for Weisselberg’s grandchildren’s school fees were true. “My dad did that,” he said, because he is a “good guy”. A “good guy” who probably wishes he raised smarter kids. With children like these, who needs enemies?

Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

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Guardian Opinion cartoon

Boris Johnson

Ben Jennings on the UK's 'cautious and irreversible' approach – cartoon

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Boris Johnson cries ‘freedom’ to fill the void where his leadership should be

[Rafael Behr](#)



Beyond pork-barrel politics there is little actual substance to the prime minister’s vision



‘Johnson’s aversion to difficult choices and face-to-face confrontation will make him an absent arbitrator, spreading confusion where he should be dictating priorities.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

‘Johnson’s aversion to difficult choices and face-to-face confrontation will make him an absent arbitrator, spreading confusion where he should be dictating priorities.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 6 Jul 2021 11.23 EDT

Everyone has found pandemic restrictions frustrating. Few see them on the spectrum of state coercion tending inevitably towards the Gulag. But the hysterical minority is overly represented in the Conservative party. As a result, the language of political emancipation is misapplied to something that would, in a more rational setting, be discussed in terms of clinical outcome. With so many people vaccinated and so many businesses craving customers, it makes sense to adjust the risk calculus, but for Tory MPs to speak of a “freedom day” is pantomime.

They mean freedom from the [face mask](#), asserting their own right to no longer care about Covid infections, while making it sound like freedom from the disease itself. This is the same reflex that wanted to celebrate Brexit with an “independence day” on the grounds that EU membership equated to colonisation by a foreign power. It is the familiar revving of ideological

engines, racing through the rhetorical gears from metaphor to hyperbole to paranoid delusion and fantasies of joining the resistance in people whose only political struggle has been for selection to a safe Tory seat.

[To mask or not to mask: what will Johnson and others do after 19 July?](#)

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Boris Johnson is, as ever, torn between the need to associate himself with happy feelings of liberation and fear of taking responsibility for the consequences of a policy unmoored to evidence. The prime minister's public statements are often an exercise in self-persuasion. He only knows what he believes by trying it out on an audience. When he cautions against getting "[demob happy](#)" he is reminding himself that he cannot get Covid done, as he claimed he could with Brexit, although he is obviously bored with the pandemic plotline in the story he wants told about his leadership.

The next volume has chapter headings without meaningful contents. Britain will "build back better" and "[level up](#)", bridging inequalities with infrastructure and jobs in low-carbon industries. There is a lot of blank space to be filled and technical policy is not Johnson's genre. Also, the whole thing has to pass through the editorial process of the Treasury's three-year [spending review](#) in the autumn.

The cabinet battle for finite resources will be the story of the autumn as departments put pressure on the chancellor, either by leaking tales of the dire consequences of underfunding or briefing that support has been promised as a way to make it so. Johnson's aversion to difficult choices and face-to-face confrontation will make him an absent arbitrator, spreading confusion where he should be dictating priorities.

It is possible that a coherent model for post-pandemic government will emerge from that tussle, but not likely. Instead, "levelling up" will continue to be a euphemism for pork-barrel politics, with funds that are nominally earmarked for the neediest towns deployed in constituencies where Tory MPs must repay the former Labour voters who switched sides.

There is nothing subtle about this process. The transactional character of the Conservative electoral offer has been explicit in recent local council and

byelection contests. The message put out in [Hartlepool](#) and, less successfully, [Batley and Spen](#), is that it pays to send a Tory MP to Westminster because that is where all the money is kept. That resonates with people who associate the physical degradation and social decay in their towns not with Johnson's Conservatives but with decades of local Labour incumbency. Sometimes the charge of complacency and neglect is earned, but it is perverse that Keir Starmer's party should feel the backlash for council cuts made inevitable by [George Osborne's austerity budgets](#).

There is something of the mafia protection racket about this dynamic. The Tories break things up and then saunter around the vandalised site, full of feigned sympathy and slippery charm steeped in menace, announcing that the way to avoid such distress in the future is to pay tribute to the Johnson syndicate. It is an effective system as long as the promise of protection is made good. That imperative sets Downing Street strategy more than any ideological conviction.

It also carries the risk of neglecting places that have been voting Conservative for much longer and with a different conception of what they get in return for that allegiance. When the safe seat of [Chesham and Amersham](#) was lost to the Liberal Democrats, party managers were quick to attribute the swing to specific grievances – [planning reform](#) and the HS2 rail line. But in private, Tory MPs admit that a wider malaise was involved. Lifelong supporters of the party, many of whom voted remain in 2016 but had no hesitation in preferring Johnson and Theresa May to Jeremy Corbyn as candidates for prime minister, are uneasy about the aggressive and mercenary style of the government.

This is not (or not exclusively) resentment of fiscal transfers from affluent southern Tory heartlands to newly captured territories in the north. It is an accumulation of unease at the character of an administration that evokes the Wildean cynic who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. It is the constant hum of petty [sleaze](#), [cronyism](#) and a supercilious way with power that makes it hard for liberal-minded Tories to glean any civic pride from association with the ruling party.

That effect should not be overstated. Johnson is still a unique performer: part raconteur, part escapist, talking his way out of troubles that would sink

other leaders. But a consequence of that shtick is the growing gap between heroic language and grubby practice. It is the duality inherent in any failing ideological project that must keep cranking the rhetoric of abstract ideals higher to cover the stoop to ever shabbier methods. The support it generates is widely spread, but maybe also shallow; a popular consumer choice, lacking the connective tissue of shared and consistent beliefs.

The Tories are impatient to cry freedom from Covid, just as they were impatient to declare independence from Brussels, believing that they have been held back, with much pent-up governing to do. In reality, getting Brexit done, then riding out the pandemic has spared them the embarrassment of the empty page where the point of [Boris Johnson](#) has yet to be written.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist
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The Didi clampdown marks a sea change in the politics of global investment

[Nils Pratley](#)



For Beijing ‘data security’ now trumps the old desire to have its tech firms seen as global champions



Visitors pass a sign for Chinese ride-hailing service Didi Chuxing at the Global Mobile Internet Conference (GMIC) in Beijing. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

Visitors pass a sign for Chinese ride-hailing service Didi Chuxing at the Global Mobile Internet Conference (GMIC) in Beijing. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

Tue 6 Jul 2021 14.54 EDT

It's tech, it's Chinese and it looks a bit like Uber, so it must be hugely valuable. That, we must assume, was the analysis of those US investors who piled into Didi last week as the ride-sharing app listed in New York at the mighty valuation of \$80bn (£60bn). If anybody read the warning in the IPO prospectus about regulatory risks in [China](#), they probably dismissed it as boilerplate stuff.

They're wiser now. The scary-sounding Cyberspace Administration of China has clobbered Didi by ordering that its app be removed from domestic online stores, a move the company said with brilliant understatement "may have an adverse impact" on its revenues in China, its biggest market by far. [Cue a 25% plunge in the share price at one point on Tuesday](#), only the fourth day of trading, a farcical state of affairs.

The short-term question is whether Didi's management and its Wall Street advisers had an inkling that a clampdown was coming amid China's well-publicised paranoia about consumer data falling into the hands of US officialdom. Reports on Tuesday said the Chinese watchdog had urged Didi to delay its listing without actually ordering it to do so. The company's new investors may want a full account.

The long-term moral of the tale, though, is easier to read: Beijing is seriously annoyed that many of its largest tech firms have been running off to New York to raise funds, rather than sticking to stock markets in Shanghai or Hong Kong. Two other companies captured by the latest cyber investigation floated in New York in the last month: Full Truck Alliance, a freight app, and Kanzhun, a recruitment firm. The timing of the clampdown looked designed to grab maximum attention.

Just to be safe, Beijing made its message explicit later on Tuesday by announcing tighter rules on the "information security responsibilities" of Chinese companies listing overseas. That would seem to cover most of the data-heavy businesses that have caught the eye of US investors.

Thirty-four have listed in the US this year, an astonishing number. Beijing seems to have decided that "data security", threatened as it views it by US audit rules, trumps its previous desire to have its tech firms regarded as global champions. If so, the Didi affair marks a major change in the politics of investment.

Sainsbury's is safe from a takeover ... for now

Simon Roberts, Sainsbury's chief executive, batted away takeover talk with the boring but correct reply that, if the board had anything to announce, it would have done so. A more mischievous boss could have said he's offended to be so far down the rankings in private equity's supermarket sweep.

Asda has fallen to TDR Capital and the Issa petrol station brothers, and Morrisons' days of independence look numbered. Why wasn't Sainsbury's first in the frame? It's a bigger business than Morrisons but its market

capitalisation is £6.2bn, almost exactly the same value as the latest offer for the Bradford-based rival.

Sainsbury's larger debt (mostly leasehold obligations) isn't an adequate answer because the group's freehold properties, though a small percentage of the total versus Morrisons', are also worth more a lot more.

The main factor may be Sainsbury's ownership of Argos and a bank, which makes it a messier proposition for private equity buyers who prefer clean lines. On that score, though, Roberts' strategy to "put food back at the heart of Sainsbury's" (which incidentally sounds an implicit criticism of his predecessor) should simplify matters. The approach means, in essence, that the peripheral bits are meant to generate cash to invest in the food business, rather than consume it.

The best defence against a takeover bid is a high share price. Sainsbury's is up from 230p to 280p since the start of the year and [Tuesday's tweak in full-year profit expectations from £620m to £660m](#) will help the mood. Keep going. Given private equity's current appetites, one can't say Sainsbury's is in safe territory yet.

Sunak's debt predicament in a nutshell

"It used to be the case that governments could inflate their debt away. It is less and less the case as we go into the future," said Richard Hughes, chairman of the Office for Budget Responsibility, on Tuesday, [as the body unveiled its annual report on budget risks.](#)

There, in a nutshell, is a key insight into the UK's finances. Quantitative easing and the bill for the pandemic have shortened the maturity of the UK's debt profile. The fiscal impact of a one percentage point increase in interest rates is six times greater than it was in 2007, estimates the OBR. It is the chancellor's biggest straitjacket and one he barely mentions. He should.

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New York

Ex-police captain Eric Adams wins Democratic primary for New York mayor

Adams, who tacked to center in large field of candidates, is expected to win in general election



Eric Adams triumphed in the city's first major race to use ranked-choice voting. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

Eric Adams triumphed in the city's first major race to use ranked-choice voting. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

[Adam Gabbatt](#) in New York and [Maanvi Singh](#) in San Francisco and agencies

Tue 6 Jul 2021 21.54 EDT

Eric Adams, a former police captain, has won the Democratic primary for mayor of [New York](#) City after appealing to the political center and

promising to strike the right balance between fighting crime and ending racial injustice in policing.

Adams would be the city's second Black mayor if elected. He triumphed over a large field in New York's first major race to use ranked-choice voting.

As of Tuesday evening, Adams had a lead of one point over his closest rival, Kathryn Garcia, according to the latest count of ballots. The Associated Press [declared](#) Adams the winner of the race shortly after a new round of vote totals was released.

[New York City's tumultuous mayor's race closes as voters struggle to choose](#)

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"I grew up poor in Brooklyn and Queens. I wore a bulletproof vest to keep my neighbors safe. I served my community as a state senator and Brooklyn borough president," Adams said in a statement [shared](#) on Twitter. "And I'm honored to be the Democratic nominee to be the mayor of the city I've always called home."

Tuesday's updated vote count included some 125,000 absentee ballots. In-person and early votes were previously published on 29 June, when [Adams had the lead](#).

The winner of the Democratic primary is likely to win the mayoral election proper in November, given the left-leaning politics of the city and an unheralded Republican opponent. Curtis Sliwa, a talk radio host and founder of the Guardian Angels volunteer crime prevention group, won the Republican primary.

Adams' closest vanquished rivals included Garcia, the former city sanitation commissioner who campaigned as a technocrat and proven problem-solver, and the former city hall legal adviser Maya Wiley, who had progressive support including an endorsement from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Andrew Yang, the 2020 presidential candidate known for his proposed universal basic income, was an early favorite but faded in the race.



Eric Adams with supporters during his election night party in New York.
Photograph: Kevin Hagen/AP

Adams, 60, is a moderate Democrat who opposed the “defund the police” movement. “We’re not going to recover as a city if we turn back time and see an increase in violence, particularly gun violence,” Adams said after three people, including a four-year-old, were shot and wounded in Times Square in May.

“If Black lives really matter, it can’t only be against police abuse. It has to be against the violence that’s ripping apart our communities,” he told supporters on the night of the primary.

Adams speaks frequently of his dual identity as a 22-year police veteran and a Black man who endured police brutality himself as a teenager. He said he had been beaten by officers at age 15. He became a police officer in 1984 and rose to the rank of captain before leaving to run for the state Senate in 2006.

While in the police department, he co-founded 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, a group that campaigned for criminal justice reform and against racial profiling. After winning a state senate seat from Brooklyn in 2006, Adams made an impression with an impassioned speech favoring

same-sex marriage rights in 2009, two years before New York's state legislators passed a marriage equality bill.

Adams also weathered a few controversies, including a 2010 report from the state inspector general that faulted his oversight of the bidding process to bring casino gambling to the Aqueduct Racetrack in Queens. Adams had accepted campaign contributions from a politically connected group bidding for the gambling franchise.

Adams was elected in 2013 as Brooklyn borough president, his current job.

The city's first experience with ranked-choice voting in a major election was bumpy. The New York City board of elections invited fresh criticism on Tuesday when it published the results after 7pm local time, having earlier pledged to reveal the totals at "brunch hours".

The delay came after the board managed to plunge the Democratic primary race [into chaos](#) last week, when it mistakenly included 135,000 "test ballots" in its vote tally.



New York City's first major race to use a ranked-choice voting system has seen some hiccups. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The mistake showed Kathryn Garcia, New York's former sanitation commissioner, narrowing the gap on Eric Adams, the Brooklyn borough president, to [less than two points](#).

Hours later, however, the board of elections said it had become aware of a “discrepancy” in its report. The elections board said its calculations had included “both test and election night results, producing approximately 135,000 additional records”.

The error sowed confusion around the system of ranked choice voting, which was used for the first time in a New York City mayoral election this year.

Adams, Garcia and Wiley all filed lawsuits last week seeking the right to review the ranked choice tally.

Wiley said in a statement Tuesday that the board “must be completely remade following what can only be described as a debacle”. As for herself, she said her campaign would have more to say soon about “next steps.”

On Tuesday morning, as voters speculated as to when the second batch of results would be released, the board of elections had adopted a glib tone on its Twitter feed.

“We promise today’s release is more brunch special vs club hours,” [the BoE tweeted](#). That tweet was sent at 8.48am, but it was well past most people’s definition of brunch hours by the time the results finally arrived.

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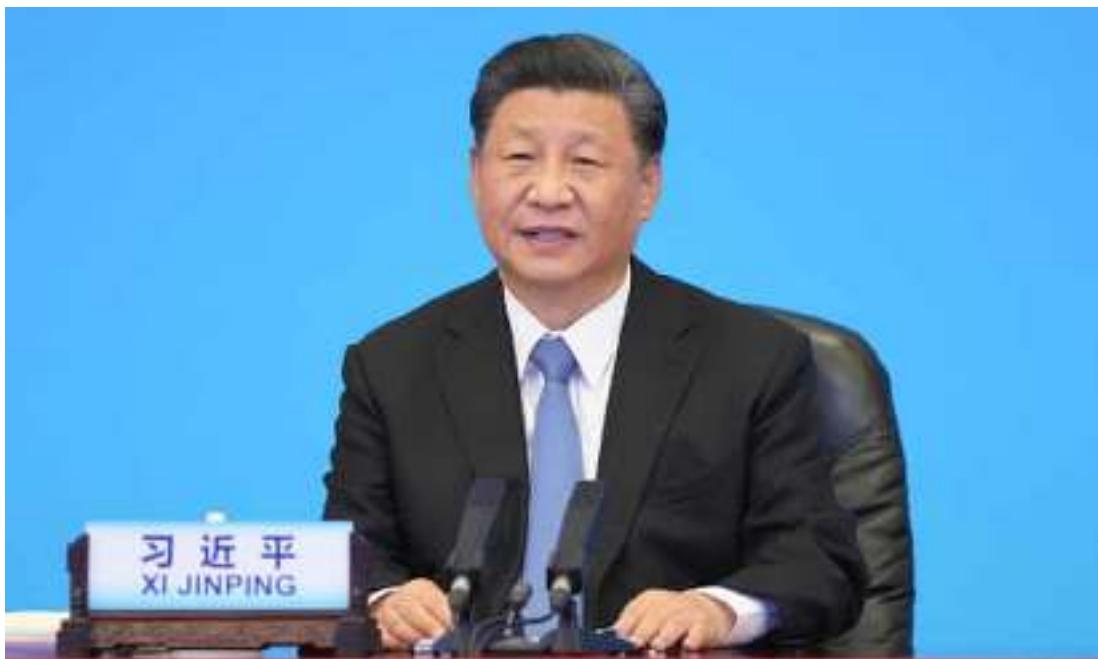
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Xi Jinping urges countries to confront ‘technology blockades’ in swipe at US

Chinese president tells summit involving political parties of 160 nations that any country stopping another’s development must be opposed



Xi Jinping addresses a virtual summit of world political parties in Beijing. He renewed a call to work for ‘a shared future for mankind’ and said any country engaged in ‘developmental decoupling’ should be rejected.
Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Xi Jinping addresses a virtual summit of world political parties in Beijing. He renewed a call to work for ‘a shared future for mankind’ and said any country engaged in ‘developmental decoupling’ should be rejected.
Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Reuters

Tue 6 Jul 2021 20.08 EDT

The Chinese president, Xi Jinping, has urged political parties worldwide to oppose any country that engages in “technology blockades” – an allusion to the US, which views China as its strategic competitor.

As US president Joe Biden’s administration has sought support from like-minded democracies including the European Union and Japan to coordinate a tougher stance against China, Beijing has doubled down on seeking support and affirmation from friendly nations such as North Korea and Serbia.

“Together, we must oppose all acts of unilateralism in the name of multilateralism, hegemony and power politics,” Xi told a virtual gathering of representatives of 500 parties from 160 countries such as Russia, Zimbabwe, Cuba and Burkina Faso on Tuesday.

“Looking from the angle of ‘my country first’, the world is narrow and crowded and often full of fierce competition,” Xi said in apparent reference to former US president Donald Trump’s “America first” policy.

[Xi Jinping warns China won't be bullied in speech marking 100-year anniversary of CCP](#)

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Xi renewed a call to work towards “building a community with a shared future for mankind” and said any country that engaged in “technology blockades” and “developmental decoupling” should be rejected.

Chinese diplomats have often criticised the US for allegedly trying to hamper China’s development by cutting off its access to US technology.

In a speech last week to a domestic audience in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, Xi said foreign forces trying to bully China would “have their heads bashed bloody against the Great Wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people”.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist party of China, was speaking on Tuesday at a summit of world political parties, one of many events held by Beijing to [commemorate the centenary of the ruling party](#).

The virtual gathering was meant to help the international community “adjust more quickly to the rise of China” and for Beijing to gain more “understanding, support and companionship”, said Guo Yezhou, vice-minister of the international department, which organised the event.

China is increasingly worried about its international image, tarnished by anger towards its initial handling of the Covid-19 outbreak, its maritime and territorial assertiveness towards neighbours, its clampdown in Hong Kong and treatment of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, and its “wolf-warrior” diplomats who engage in a war of words with critics.

A survey of 17 advanced economies released last Wednesday by the US-based Pew Research Center showed that views about China have remained broadly negative and confidence in Xi near historic lows.

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Kenya in rush to vaccinate 4m children as measles cases surge

WHO reports measles outbreaks in eight African countries amid huge fall-off in jabs during Covid



Kenyan children wait for their measles vaccine. Fewer than half of Kenyan children have had the required two doses. Photograph: RGB Ventures/SuperStock/Alamy

Kenyan children wait for their measles vaccine. Fewer than half of Kenyan children have had the required two doses. Photograph: RGB Ventures/SuperStock/Alamy

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[Peter Muiruri](#) in Nairobi

Wed 7 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Kenya has restarted its vaccination programme in an effort to tackle the re-emergence of measles, which has surged in the country during the Covid restrictions.

A 10-day campaign against highly contagious measles and rubella has begun to target 4 million children aged nine months to five years in 22 of Kenya's 47 counties where outbreaks are highest.

Measles is the “third most common cause of deaths among children from vaccine-preventable diseases”, the health ministry said. In 2020, only 85% of children in the east African country [had received the first dose](#) of the vaccine and less than 50% had had the second.

The [exercise](#) will involve 16,000 health workers at 5,061 vaccination centres.

An [assessment](#) conducted in Kenya with the support of the World Health Organization showed a big rise in the number of unvaccinated children. “The unprecedented increase in the number of unvaccinated children,

accumulation of susceptible children to more than 2.1 million and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has aided outbreaks,” the ministry said.

According to the WHO, it takes at least 95% of the combined MCV1 and MCV2 vaccine coverage to prevent outbreaks. Across sub-Saharan Africa, however, the level of first doses being administered has stagnated at 69% since 2013. “Only seven countries in the region achieved 95% measles-containing vaccine coverage in 2019,” the WHO said.

Kenya’s 4 million children are among 16.6 million in Africa who missed supplemental vaccination against measles between January 2020 and April 2021, according to the WHO.

In April, the WHO reported of major outbreaks of measles in eight African countries that affected “tens of thousands” as efforts to contain Covid took centre stage.

“Children under five years can die from measles complications and if the virus circulation is not stopped, their risk of exposure increases daily. We know that vaccination is by far the best way to keep these children safe,” said Maniza Zaman, Unicef representative in Kenya.

The WHO also reported that the “quality of measles surveillance in Africa fell to the lowest level in seven years in 2020, with just 11 countries meeting their target”.

[Measles cases hit 20-year high as Covid disrupts vaccinations, report finds](#)
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Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO regional director for Africa, said: “Recent outbreaks of measles, but also yellow fever, cholera and meningitis, all point to worrying gaps in immunisation coverage and surveillance in Africa. As we fight Covid-19, we cannot leave anyone dangerously exposed to preventable diseases. I urge all countries to double down on essential health services, including life-saving vaccination campaigns.”

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of global measles cases more than quadrupled to the highest in 23

years, from 132,490 in 2016 to 869,770 in 2019. Mortality rates almost doubled, with 207,500 reported deaths.

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[Britney Spears](#)

Britney Spears's court-appointed lawyer asks to resign from conservatorship

Samuel Ingham has faced intense scrutiny for his representation of Spears, who has said she's been unable to choose her own lawyer



In court last month, Spears said she wanted the conservatorship terminated.
Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

In court last month, Spears said she wanted the conservatorship terminated.
Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

[Sam Levin in Los Angeles](#)

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Tue 6 Jul 2021 20.19 EDT

Britney Spears's court-appointed lawyer has asked to resign from the conservatorship that has controlled her life for 13 years.

The news of lawyer Samuel D Ingham's decision to step down comes after the singer's emotional courtroom testimony prompted the [resignation of her manager](#) and the withdrawal of a [wealth management firm](#) involved in her conservatorship. The legal arrangement, which has been in place since 2008, has given Spears's father and other parties intense authority over her career, finances, personal life and medical care.

In court last month, Spears said she wanted the conservatorship terminated, saying it was abusive and that the arrangement had [forced her to perform](#) and take medications against her will, and controlled her reproductive rights.

The fallout has been swift. In a short [court filing](#) on Tuesday, Ingham said he intended to resign as soon as the court could appoint Spears another lawyer. The law firm, Loeb & Loeb, which had been working with Ingham, also announced its intent to resign.

[Britney Spears wants out of her conservatorship. Experts say a long fight could lie ahead](#)

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Ingham in particular has faced intense scrutiny in recent weeks. Spears testified that she wanted to be able to choose her own lawyer, but that the conservatorship has blocked her from doing so. The arrangement controls her finances, and Ingham was appointed at the start when the court deemed Spears incapable of selecting an attorney.

In the conservatorship, Spears's estate pays for her court-appointed lawyer as well as the opposing lawyers and others involved in the conservatorship. Ingham has made \$3m as her lawyer, making \$475 an hour – a special rate allowed by the court in cases with “unusual problems requiring extraordinary expertise”, the New York Times recently [reported](#).

Investigations by the Times and the New Yorker have [raised questions](#) about the fraught process that created the conservatorship in the first place, and suggest that Spears has repeatedly [objected to the arrangement for years](#) before her first public comments on the case last month.

Critics have questioned Ingham's representation of Spears after she testified that she did not know she could file a petition to terminate the conservatorship. While internal records suggest that Spears had forcefully complained about the arrangement to a court investigator, Ingham has never filed to end it. He has in recent years filed requests to have the singer's father, Jamie Spears, removed as a conservator.

Ingham did not immediately respond to request for comment on Tuesday.

Some legal experts say that if Spears is able to hire her own lawyer, she could expedite a process to challenge the conservatorship. Others warn that the court process could drag on for years, noting that it is difficult for people to end conservatorships once they are deemed incapacitated.

Spears's manager, Larry Rudolph, announced his resignation earlier this week and suggested that the singer may want to retire.

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Human activity influencing global rainfall, study finds

Anthropogenic warming of climate has been a factor in extreme precipitation events globally, researchers say



A car in a flooded portion of I-94 in Detroit, Michigan, several days after heavy rains flooded parts of the city. Photograph: Matthew Hatcher/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

A car in a flooded portion of I-94 in Detroit, Michigan, several days after heavy rains flooded parts of the city. Photograph: Matthew Hatcher/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Charlotte Burton
Wed 7 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Human activity such as such as greenhouse gas emissions and land use change were a key factor in extreme precipitation events such as flooding and landslides around the world, a study has found.

In recent years, there have been numerous instances of flooding and landslides: extreme precipitation, an amount of rainfall or snowfall that exceeds what is normal for a given region, can be a cause of such events.

Natural variations in climate, such as El Niño–Southern Oscillation (Enso), affect precipitation. But attribution research studies, such as the latest modelling study, [published on Tuesday in Nature Communications](#), work to better understand whether human actions impacting the climate, such as greenhouse gas emissions and land-use changes, contribute to the likelihood and severity of extreme events.

In the study, UCLA researchers looked at global climate records to examine whether anthropogenic influence – human-induced changes to the climate – had affected extreme precipitation. By examining multiple data sets of observed precipitation, the researchers were able to build a global picture, and found evidence of human activity affecting extreme precipitation in all of them.

“It is vital to identify the changes [to precipitation patterns] caused by human action, compared to the changes caused by natural climate variability,” explained lead researcher Gavin Madakumbura. “It allows us to manage water resources and plan adaption measures to changes driven by climate change.”

Up till now, work in this field has been restricted to countries, rather than applied globally. But the research team utilised machine learning to create a global data set.

Human-induced climate change is causing the Earth’s temperature to increase. Different mechanisms link warmer temperatures to extreme precipitation. “The dominant mechanism [driving extreme precipitation] for most regions around the world is that warmer air can hold more water vapour,” said Madakumbura. “This fuels storms.”

While there are regional differences, and some places are becoming drier, [Met Office data](#) shows that overall, intense rainfall is increasing globally, meaning the雨iest days of the year are getting wetter. Changes to rainfall extremes – the number of very heavy rainfall days – are also a problem.

These short, intense periods of rainfall can lead to flash flooding, with devastating impacts on infrastructure and the environment.

“We are already observing a 1.2C warming compared to pre-industrial levels,” pointed out Dr Sihan Li, a senior research associate at the University of Oxford, who was not involved in the study. She said: “If warming continues to increase, we will get more intense episodes of extreme precipitation, but also extreme drought events as well.”

Li said that while the machine-learning method used in the study was cutting edge, it currently did not allow for the attribution of individual factors that can influence precipitation extremes, such as anthropogenic aerosols, land-use change, or volcanic eruptions.

The method of machine learning used in the study learned from data alone. Madakumbura pointed out that in the future, “we can aid this learning by imposing climate physics in the algorithm, so it will not only learn whether the extreme precipitation has changed, but also the mechanisms, why it has changed”. “That’s the next step,” he said.

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Asia Pacific sees sharp rise in Covid infections as Delta strain threatens new wave

From South Korea to Australia, authorities are struggling to contain the highly transmissible coronavirus strain that has caused a surge in UK, Europe and US

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



People wait in line to refill their oxygen tanks at a filling station in Jakarta. Indonesia is facing an oxygen crisis amid a surge in Covid-19 cases.
Photograph: Wisnu Agung Prasetyo/SOPA Imag/Rex/Shutterstock

People wait in line to refill their oxygen tanks at a filling station in Jakarta. Indonesia is facing an oxygen crisis amid a surge in Covid-19 cases.
Photograph: Wisnu Agung Prasetyo/SOPA Imag/Rex/Shutterstock

Guardian staff and agencies

Wed 7 Jul 2021 00.22 EDT

Countries throughout [Asia Pacific](#) – from South Korea to Australia – have been hit by a rise in coronavirus infections as the Delta variant threatens a new wave of the pandemic even in a region renowned for tackling the virus with a high degree of success.

China reported 57 new coronavirus cases in the mainland for 6 July, up from 23 cases a day earlier, the national health authority said on Wednesday. It was the highest daily tally of infections since 30 January.

[Air VnV: sold-out flights start from Taiwan to Guam for ‘vacation and vaccination’ trips](#)

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Fifteen of the new cases were local infections, the national health commission said in a statement. All 15 cases were located in Yunnan province in the city of Ruili, which borders Myanmar. In response, authorities locked down the city, shutting most businesses and requiring residents to stay at home.

The latest cases were discovered during mass testing of residents. The positive cases include Chinese and Myanmar nationals in the city, where there is an active cross-border trade. Authorities said they would step up border controls.

Ruili previously had a Covid outbreak in March and launched a campaign to vaccinate the entire city in April.

China has relied on a tough lockdown strategy and mass testing to tamp down outbreaks, even as it has stepped up the pace of vaccinations. Central health officials have said they want to vaccinate 80% of the population.

In [South Korea](#), where vaccinations have been slow, authorities reported the highest cases since December 2020. The 1,212 new cases reported on

Wednesday came close to the country's largest daily increase during the pandemic, on Christmas Day, when officials listed 1,240 new cases.

Cases of the highly contagious Delta variant are “spreading fast, especially in the Seoul metropolitan area”, [Yonhap](#) reports. It was spreading especially rapidly among unvaccinated people in their 20s and 30s.

[New Zealand not willing to risk UK-style ‘live with Covid’ policy, says Jacinda Ardern](#)

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The government had planned to raise the cap on private social gatherings from four to six people and allow restaurants to extend indoor dining by two hours starting this month. But officials in Seoul and nearby areas have held off as infections rise. Just 30% of South Korea’s people have received the first dose of a coronavirus vaccine as of Wednesday.

Prime minister Kim Boo-kyum says officials will consider tougher social distancing rules if transmissions continue to grow over the next two or three days.

In **Australia**, which has vaccinated less than 10% of its eligible population, cases continued to climb in the state of New South Wales, which is at the centre of a new outbreak. On Wednesday the state [extended the lockdown in its capital Sydney](#) for another week to contain the latest outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant.

The two-week stay-home orders, which were scheduled to end Friday, will now end on 16 July, state premier Gladys Berejiklian told reporters in Sydney. Twenty-seven new locally acquired cases of Covid were reported in NSW, up from 18 a day earlier, taking the total infections in the outbreak to more than 350.

The Delta variant is spreading in **Thailand**, too – the country reported 54 deaths and 6,519 new cases on Wednesday. Delta cases now account for the majority of new cases in Bangkok.

Finally, in **Indonesia**, a nightmarish coronavirus wave has brought hospitals to their knees, forcing desperate families to hunt for oxygen tanks to treat the sick and dying at home.

['Dire need': Australia urged to offer more aid to Indonesia as Covid crushes health system](#)

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Nearly 1,000 Indonesian medical workers have died of Covid-19, including more than a dozen who were already fully inoculated.

On Tuesday, Jakarta said about 10,000 concentrators – devices that generate oxygen – were to be shipped from nearby Singapore. Some had already been flown in on a Hercules cargo plane. The government said it was also in talks with other countries, including China.

Senior minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan said the country was bracing for up to “70,000 [cases] per day at worst – but we hope that won’t happen”.

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The far right

Spain's far-right Vox party under fire for veiled Twitter threat against editor

Party [doxxes](#) satirical editor, suggesting followers demand he ‘takes responsibility when he leaves his office’



An artist working on the satirical magazine El Jueves. Photograph: Álvaro Rincón Sanz/undrconstruction.com

An artist working on the satirical magazine El Jueves. Photograph: Álvaro Rincón Sanz/undrconstruction.com

[Sam Jones](#) in Madrid

[@swajones](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 14.48 EDT

Reporters without Borders (RSF) has criticised the far-right Spanish party Vox for suggesting that the head of an editorial group that publishes a

satirical magazine that frequently lampoons the party be held to account for its content on the street outside his office.

On Tuesday, Vox's official Twitter account published the person's name and photograph, and accused the magazine, El Jueves, of "spreading hate against millions of Spaniards on a daily basis".

It added: "It's possible that many of them may begin demanding that he takes responsibility for it when they see him leave his office." The tweet referred to the city and street location of the office.

The party appeared to have been especially irked by El Jueves's recent decision to [depict Vox's leadership](#) in series of grotesque, Garbage Pail Kid-style caricatures.

The cartoons showed its leaders defecating, wearing underwear decorated with swastikas and oozing poison. One showed Vox co-founder José Antonio Ortega Lara, who was kidnapped by Eta terrorists and held in [dungeon-like conditions for 18 months](#), blistering in the sun. A caption riffing on the fascist anthem Cara al Sol read: "It's not healthy to be in the sun after so long in the dark."

Vox's actions were condemned by RSF, which works to protect freedom of expression. In [a tweet](#), the group said Vox had crossed every line – "not just ethical ones, which it's ignored for some time, but also legal ones" – by "singling out an editor and providing his work address so that 'he takes responsibility' when he steps on to the street".

The satirical website El Mundo Today also offered its support and solidarity. "The ultimate aim of this threat is to menace the freedom of expression of editors, media owners, humorists, artists and, indeed, of any citizen," it [said in a statement](#).

"In a country such as [Spain](#), which has suffered the scourge of terrorism and in which there are precedents for acts of violence against satirical publications, this move marks a red line that is neither legal nor ethically tolerable."

The former Spanish health minister Salvador Illa offered his “[most forceful condemnation](#)” of Vox’s actions, while his fellow Socialist MP José Zaragoza [tweeted](#): “They hate humour. They hate intelligence, they hate, they hate, they hate. That’s why Vox has singled out the editor of El Jueves – because humour is the the greatest enemy of hatred.”

The artists behind the cartoons said they were delighted that their work “[was winding up the fascist cry-babies so much](#)”.

Vox’s attack is not the first time El Jueves has found itself in trouble. In 2007, Spanish police were ordered to enter newsagents across the country to remove copies of El Jueves that featured a cartoon of the then [heir to the throne having sex](#).

Ten years later, the magazine’s editor [was summoned to court](#) over a tongue-in-cheek article that suggested the riot police deployed to stop the illegal Catalan independence referendum had snorted the region’s entire supply of cocaine.

El Jueves replied to Vox with a tweet and a shrug, [writing](#): ““And now, to prove that we’re not the far right, we’re going to do exactly what other far-right groups have done before.””

This article was downloaded by [calibre](#) from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/06/spains-far-right-vox-party-under-fire-for-veiled-twitter-threat-against-editor>



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[Nicaragua](#)

Nicaragua police arrest six opposition leaders under sweeping ‘treason’ laws

Daniel Ortega’s continuing crackdown targets farmer activists, student leader and potential presidential rival



Lester Alemán, a former student leader, was arrested Monday under Nicaragua’s draconian treason laws. Photograph: Alfredo Zuniga/AP

Lester Alemán, a former student leader, was arrested Monday under Nicaragua’s draconian treason laws. Photograph: Alfredo Zuniga/AP

Associated Press in Managua

Tue 6 Jul 2021 14.42 EDT

Nicaraguan police have arrested a half dozen more opposition figures, including the sixth presidential hopeful to have been detained in [a crackdown that started last month](#).

Among those arrested on Monday was Lester Alemán, a former student leader who returned to [Nicaragua](#) after exile but stayed in safe houses. Those detained also included the presidential contender Medardo Mairena and Max Jerez, another student leader.

[Nicaragua rounds up president's critics in sweeping pre-election crackdown](#)

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Two leaders of farmers' groups, Pedro Mena and Freddy Navas, were also arrested, and a third, Pablo Morales, was listed by opposition activists as having been detained.

Almost all were arrested under "treason" laws that President Daniel Ortega has used to detain almost all his potential rivals in the 7 November elections.

On Tuesday, the European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said that "more restrictive" measures may be needed against Ortega's Sandinista regime.

"The situation has reached such an extreme that member states will have to study more concrete actions, and not just 'enough already, Mr Ortega,'" Borrell told a session of the European Parliament.

Alemán played a leading role in 2018 protests against Ortega's government [that were met with brutal repression](#); he went into exile in the United States after that and knew he might be a target when he returned in 2019. Alemán hadn't lived at home for three years.

Alemán's relatively new Citizens for Freedom party has not selected its candidate yet, but Alemán had said last week he planned to run.

The government has arrested at least 27 opposition figures over the past month. Most face vague allegations of crimes against the state. Ortega alleges the April 2018 street protests were part of an organized coup attempt with foreign backing.

Alemán rose to fame in May 2018, a month after the huge protests erupted and paralyzed much of the country before being violently put down. At the

first attempt at dialogue with Ortega, [Alemán shocked those watching the live televised event.](#)

[Daniel Ortega called a 'killer' as talks open with protesters on Nicaragua crisis](#)

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“This is not a table of dialogue. This is a table to negotiate your exit and you know it well,” he told the president. “Give up!”

Some had said previously that opposition figures like Alemán and Mairena should not dignify the marred elections by participating. With five of the best-known potential candidates already in jail and the field tilted heavily in Ortega’s favor as he pursues a fourth consecutive term, some believe the opposition should sit out and not legitimize an Ortega victory.

But in the case of Alemán and Mairena, Ortega solved that dilemma by tossing them, too, in jail, where political prisoners are mostly held in secret locations, incommunicado, with no access to relatives or lawyers.

Candidates must register by 2 August. Two other potential candidates from Alemán’s party – Juan Sebastián Chamorro y Arturo Cruz – have already been arrested.

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[Colombia](#)

Colombian court accuses soldiers of murdering at least 120 civilians

Military also accused of disappearing 24 people and presenting them as guerrilla fighters as part of false positives scandal



Members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) work in the recovery of mortal remains of people killed by armed groups during the country's armed conflict, in a cemetery in the Catatumbo jungle, in Colombia. Photograph: Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty Images

Members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) work in the recovery of mortal remains of people killed by armed groups during the country's armed conflict, in a cemetery in the Catatumbo jungle, in Colombia. Photograph: Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters in Bogotá
Tue 6 Jul 2021 15.03 EDT

A Colombian court has accused 10 members of the military and a civilian of forcibly disappearing 24 people and murdering at least 120 civilians and falsely presenting them as guerrilla fighters who had been killed in combat.

[The ‘false positives’ scandal that felled Colombia’s military hero](#)

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The charges on Tuesday marked the first time Colombia’s special jurisdiction for peace (JEP) tribunal has accused members of Colombia’s army in connection with the so-called false positives scandal, in which [soldiers murdered civilians and classified them as rebels killed in combat](#) so they could receive promotions or other benefits.

The defendants played a decisive role in the murders, which were presented as combat deaths in the Catatumbo region of Colombia’s Norte de Santander province between January 2007 and August 2008, in order to [inflate body counts](#), the court said.

The accused, identified by the JEP as those responsible for giving orders without which the crimes would not have systematically happened, include a general, six officers, three non-commissioned officers and a civilian.

“It was a pattern of macrocriminality, which is to say, the repetition of at least 120 murders during two years in the same region by the same group of people associated with a criminal organization and following the same modus operandi,” said the magistrate, Catalina Díaz.

Victims included farmers and retailers, among others, she said.

The JEP is a tribunal created under the 2016 peace deal to prosecute former Farc members and military leaders for alleged war crimes.

[Colombia tribunal reveals at least 6,402 people were killed by army to boost body count](#)

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At least 6,402 people were [murdered by members of Colombia’s army](#) between 2002 and 2008 according to the JEP, while some victims groups say

the figure could be higher.

Dozens of army officers who have been detained and convicted for their part in the scandal have testified before the JEP as they seek more lenient sentences.

If those accused on Tuesday do not accept the charges within 30 days, they could receive a sentence of up to 20 years in jail in a civilian court, said the magistrate and JEP president, Eduardo Cifuentes.

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‘Historic’ step as Trudeau appoints Canada’s first Indigenous governor general

Mary Simon takes post at time of strained relations between Canada and First Nations after discoveries of unmarked graves



Inuk leader Mary Simon speaks at the announcement of her appointment as Canada’s next governor general. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Inuk leader Mary Simon speaks at the announcement of her appointment as Canada’s next governor general. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

[Leyland Cecco in Toronto](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 12.12 EDT

Canada will have its first ever Indigenous governor general after prime minister [Justin Trudeau](#) appointed Inuk leader Mary Simon as the Queen's representative in Canada.

Describing the move as a “historic” step, Trudeau announced Simon’s appointment on Tuesday after coming under mounting pressure to choose a new viceregal. His previous selection resigned after [allegations of bullying](#) in January.

“Canada is a place defined by people. People who serve those around them, who tackle big challenges with hope and determination, and above all, who never stop working to build a brighter tomorrow,” said Trudeau. “In other words, people like Mary Simon.”

Originally from Kangiqsualujjuaq, in the Nunavik region of Quebec, Simon is a longtime advocate of Inuit rights. She previously served as the former president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the country’s national advocacy organization for Inuit. She also served as Canada’s first Inuk ambassador in Denmark and for circumpolar affairs.

“I am honoured, humbled and ready to be Canada’s first indigenous Governor General,” she said, also giving remarks in Inuktitut, her first language. “I can confidently say that my appointment is a historic and inspirational moment for Canada and an important step forward on the long path towards reconciliation.”

Simon’s appointment comes at a time when Canada’s rocky relationship with Indigenous nations has worsened, following the discovery of [more than one thousand unmarked graves across the country](#).

In her remarks, Simon spoke of the need for the country to “fully recognize, memorialize and come to terms with the [atrocities of our collective past](#)” as more is learned about the legacy of residential schools.

Quick Guide

Canada's residential schools

Show



Canada's residential schools

Over the course of 100 years, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families to attend state-funded Christian boarding schools in an effort to forcibly assimilate them into Canadian society.

They were given new names, forcibly converted to Christianity and prohibited from speaking their native languages. Thousands died of disease, neglect and suicide; many were never returned to their families.

The last residential school closed in 1996.

Nearly three-quarters of the 130 residential schools were run by Roman Catholic missionary congregations, with others operated by the Presbyterian, Anglican and the United Church of Canada, which is today the largest Protestant denomination in the country.

In 2015, a historic [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) which concluded that the residential school system [amounted to a policy of cultural genocide](#).

Survivor testimony made it clear that sexual, emotional and physical abuse were rife at the schools. And the trauma suffered by students was often

passed down to younger generations – a reality magnified by systematic inequities that persist across the country.

Dozens of First Nations [do not have access to drinking water](#), and [racism against Indigenous people is rampant within the healthcare system](#). Indigenous people are overrepresented in federal prisons and [Indigenous women are killed at a rate far higher](#) than other groups.

The commissioners identified 20 unmarked gravesites at former residential schools, but they also warned that more unidentified gravesites were yet to be found across the country.

Photograph: Provincial Archives Of Saskatchewan/PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF SASKATCHE

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Trudeau's previous pick for governor general, Julie Payette, resigned in January after a number of [anonymous staff told](#) the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation they were berated by Payette to the point of tears. Others said that she would call their work "shit" and order them out of her office.

[UK faces reckoning after unmarked Indigenous graves discovered in Canada](#)
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The position is largely symbolic but once formally installed, Simon will outrank Trudeau as holder of highest federal office in Canada, second only to the Queen.

Ahead of a looming election, Trudeau had faced pressure to appoint a governor general. One of Simon's tasks will be to dissolve parliament upon the prime minister's request.

Simon's landmark appointment also comes amid growing skepticism over the role the [monarchy plays in Canada](#).

[According to recent polling](#) 55% of respondents believe the royal family is no longer relevant. Given the chance, 43% of respondents said they would

eliminate the position of governor general. Only 22% would opt to keep the role as is.

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Compulsory mask-wearing due to end on 19 July but people may still be advised to wear them in some settings

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Masks are currently required on public transport and when moving around enclosed indoor spaces. Photograph: Neil Hood/TGS Photo/Rex/Shutterstock

Masks are currently required on public transport and when moving around enclosed indoor spaces. Photograph: Neil Hood/TGS Photo/Rex/Shutterstock

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent

@breeallegretti

Mon 5 Jul 2021 05.22 EDT

Ministers have been accused of giving mixed messages about where people should continue to wear masks, as the government prepares to end their compulsory use in most places across [England](#).

Boris Johnson is expected to announce in a [Downing Street press conference at 5pm](#) that from 19 July face coverings will no longer be legally mandated but optional instead, as part of a wider pivot towards dropping legal restrictions and telling people to learn to live with Covid.

Masks are currently required to be worn in shops, places of worship, on public transport and when moving around enclosed indoor spaces such as hospitality venues. But as part of Johnson's attempt to return life as close to normal as possible, they are expected to be required only in health and care settings.

Guidance will also be issued about when people might choose to wear a mask.

Some politicians seem split on whether and where they will continue to wear face coverings. The mandate was introduced last summer in an attempt to stop the aerosol transmission of Covid-19 in places where people could not keep a 2-metre distance.

The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, said at the end of June that he would stop wearing a mask "as soon as possible" and was looking forward to life getting "back to normal".

Robert Jenrick, the communities secretary, said the same when speaking to Sky News on Sunday. "I don't particularly want to wear a mask, I don't

think a lot of people enjoy doing it,” he said. “These will be matters of personal choice. Some members of society will want to do so for perfectly legitimate reasons. But it will be a different period where we as private citizens makes these judgments, rather than the government telling you what to do.”

Helen Whately, the care minister, did not go as far, telling BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that she was “looking forward to not having to wear a face mask so much as I have been” and that they had downsides for people who relied on lipreading.

“I don’t know that I’ll be ditching it entirely,” she said, adding: “There may be times when it is appropriate to wear if I’m somewhere it’s crowded,” such as on a crowded commuter train.

She confirmed that face masks would still be required in care homes and healthcare settings, but that in the rest of society it would be up to people’s “common sense”.

Huw Merriman, a Tory MP and chair of the Commons transport select committee, said if the government advised people to wear face coverings on public transport instead of forcing them to, that would be a “cop out”. He said it would be very confusing for passengers and mixed-messaging.

The split in ministers’ personal decisions prompted a government adviser to accuse the government of sending mixed messages.

Stephen Reicher, a professor at the University of St Andrews who is a member of the government subcommittee on behavioural science, said masks were a “crucial mitigation” in crowded, badly ventilated spaces, and he hit out at the “very confused messaging”.

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He said: “My fear is that when the government says ‘you take your responsibility seriously’, what they’re saying is actually ‘we’re not going to give you that support and we’re not going to take our responsibilities seriously’.”

The move also appears to have worried some health professionals. Dr Nikki Kanani, the medical director of primary care for NHS England, told Times Radio: “One of the things that we know is masks work. If there is advice to keep wearing masks, I know I will and I’ll be encouraging others to do so as well.”

Prof Stephen Powis, the medical director of NHS England, told the BBC on Sunday he would wait to see what the announcement on masks was, but said: “Those habits to reduce infection are a good thing.”

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[Boris Johnson](#)

PM to confirm 19 July end to Covid rules despite scientists' warnings

Boris Johnson to press ahead with final stage of unlocking in England amid huge rise in infections

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Boris Johnson is to announce on Monday that the lifting of most remaining Covid-19 restrictions in England will go ahead on 19 July. Photograph: Reuters

Boris Johnson is to announce on Monday that the lifting of most remaining Covid-19 restrictions in England will go ahead on 19 July. Photograph: Reuters

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Linda Geddes](#)

Sun 4 Jul 2021 17.30 EDT

Boris Johnson is to announce that the lifting of most remaining Covid-19 restrictions in England will go ahead on 19 July amid a backlash from government scientific advisers who have warned that doing so would be like building new “[variant factories](#)”.

Despite cases having risen to their highest level since January 2021, the prime minister is set to press ahead with the final stage of unlocking in two weeks.

In a Downing Street press conference on Monday afternoon, he is expected to announce that, with 86% of adults in the UK having had at least a first jab, the government will move from relying on legal curbs to control people’s behaviour to letting individuals make their own decisions.

Changes to be announced include allowing fully vaccinated adults to travel to [amber list countries](#) without having to self-isolate when they return; making the wearing of [face masks voluntary](#), apart from in hospitals and other healthcare settings; and no longer requiring fully vaccinated adults to self-isolate if they have come into contact with an infected person.

01:12

Robert Jenrick says Covid data appears to be 'in right place' ahead of 19 July – video

The school [bubbles system](#) that has forced hundreds of thousands of pupils to quarantine at home if someone in their bubble tested positive is also expected to be dropped, while pub and restaurant customers may no longer have to scan an NHS QR code.

The different approach to tackling Covid was supported by the health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), who claimed it would be impossible to eradicate the disease and that the country would have to “find ways to cope with it”, as with flu.

He also said the health arguments for opening up were “compelling” but conceded dangerous new variants could emerge that current vaccines were ineffective against.

As well as announcing that [nightclubs can reopen](#) in two weeks’ time, Johnson is due to reveal the results of government reviews into social distancing and Covid status certificates.

The Guardian [revealed last week](#) that ministers were planning to remove all mandatory mask and social distancing restrictions in England from 19 July, though national guidance may remain in place encouraging caution in high-risk areas such as on public transport.

Covid [status certificates](#) – an idea Johnson once championed as a way to allow access to places such as theatres and pubs for those who can prove they have been vaccinated, had a recent negative test result or have antibodies – are also expected to be ditched, though government sources have hinted they could be introduced in the winter.

Conservative MPs who were once more cautious have mostly been convinced the time is right for mass unlocking, with one saying it was becoming clear rising infections were “not remotely correlated” to hospitalisations or deaths so “we’ve just got to get on with it”. But another Tory figure warned “the science may become a second thought” after 19 July.

Robert Jenrick, the communities secretary, revealed on Sky News he would shed his mask as soon as possible, while Prof Adam Finn, a member of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, said he would carry on wearing a face covering “indefinitely” when in an enclosed, crowded space.

Concern is building among scientists about the new wave of infections in the UK and ministers' determination to press on with unlocking.

[UK Covid cases](#)

Stephen Reicher, a professor at the University of St Andrews who is also a member of the government subcommittee advising on behavioural science, said: "It is frightening to have a 'health' secretary who still thinks Covid is flu. Who is unconcerned at levels of infection. Who doesn't realise that those who do best for health also do best for the economy. Who wants to ditch all protections while only half of us are vaccinated."

He added: "Above all, it is frightening to have a 'health' secretary who wants to make all protections a matter of [personal choice](#) when the key message of the pandemic is: this isn't an 'I' thing, it's a 'we' thing."

Prof Susan Michie, the director of the Centre for Behaviour Change at University College London (UCL), who sits on the same subcommittee, said: "Allowing community transmission to surge is like building new 'variant factories' at a very fast rate."

[UK scientists caution that lifting of Covid rules is like building 'variant factories'](#)

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A further 24,248 cases were [reported in the UK](#) on Sunday – up from 15,953 on the same day the previous week. There were a further 15 deaths.

The north-east of [England](#) recorded a particular surge in infections, with South Tyneside reporting a 195% increase in the seven days to 29 June, Gateshead a 142% increase and Sunderland a 131% increase. Only Oxford and Tamworth have recorded greater increases during this period, with all five areas having a prevalence of between 480 and 585 coronavirus cases per 100,000 people.

"Something weird is happening in the north-east, and it is a bit worrying," said Christina Pagel, a professor of operational research at UCL. Not only

were cases there rising rapidly, so were hospitalisations and the proportion of tests recording a positive result, she said.

Other scientists said the relaxation of many of the restrictions, while not risk-free, made sense.

Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia, said: “Double-vaccinated people are less likely to get an infection and even if infected are less likely to infect others … We will eventually come into an equilibrium with this virus as we have with all the other endemic respiratory infections.”

Prof Allyson Pollock, a clinical professor of public health at Newcastle University, said Javid’s approach was sensible. She said: “Population immunity is rapidly being achieved due to a combination of naturally acquired immunity through infection and vaccination. Unknowns are duration of immunity, impact of variants and who is at individual risk of reinfection or transmission.”

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Pressure is growing on ministers to decide whether to extend the vaccination programme [to cover children](#), given the end of the summer holidays – a period that could be used to inoculate under-18s while they are out of school – is fast approaching.

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, said everyone was “desperate” for restrictions to be eased but the government needed to increase [sick pay for self-isolation](#) and introduce ventilation support for buildings to help push cases down.

Letting the virus spread would only mean more pressure on the NHS and disruption to education, he said, calling on Javid to justify telling people to live with the virus by explaining “what level of mortality and [cases of long Covid](#) he considers acceptable”.

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Politics trumps Covid science in Javid's push to 'live with the virus'

Experts are urging greater vaccination coverage and action over ventilation in public spaces before lifting restrictions



The health secretary said: 'We are going to have to learn to accept the existence of Covid and find ways to cope with it – just as we already do with flu.' Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

The health secretary said: 'We are going to have to learn to accept the existence of Covid and find ways to cope with it – just as we already do with flu.' Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

[Linda Geddes](#) Science correspondent

Sun 4 Jul 2021 15.22 EDT

For months, the prime minister has repeated the mantra that further easing of Covid-19 restrictions would be about “data and not dates”. Yet, as coronavirus cases in the UK continue to surge, and scientists warn that fully reopening society risks building “[variant factories](#)” in our own back yard, the government appears poised to put one date – 19 July – ahead of everything else. Once again, politics has trumped science.

Since Sajid Javid’s appointment as health secretary on 26 June, the UK has confirmed a further 188,538 coronavirus cases, with approximately 25,000 extra people testing positive each day. On Sunday, Javid said that the best way to protect the nation’s health was by lifting the main Covid-19 restrictions, even though this would result in a further significant increase in cases. “We are going to have to learn to accept the existence of Covid and find ways to cope with it – just as we already do with flu,” he said.

Another mantra beloved both of politicians and scientists is that we’ll need to “learn to live with the virus”, though they often disagree on the timing of when this recalibration should take place. Until now, the government has also avoided specifying the meaning of this slippery phrase. Now that it is poised to set a date, we are about to learn what the health secretary’s vision of “living with the virus” actually means.

For Javid, a thriving economy is at odds with continuing Covid-19 restrictions. There’s no doubt that measures such as shutting down businesses and events, or instructing individuals and entire school bubbles to self-isolate if they come into contact with an infected person, are economically damaging and may be harmful to people’s mental, or even physical health. Other measures, however, such as the wearing of masks, are a mere inconvenience for most people, but they do reduce transmission – particularly indoors, when coronavirus cases are high. Doing away with them has nothing to do with the economy or people’s mental health; it is motivated by ideology.

No scientist is arguing that Covid restrictions should remain in place forever. “The frustrating thing is that we know double-vaccines work: they protect the vast majority of people, even from variants, even from Delta, so there is an endpoint to this,” said Stephen Griffin, professor of virology at the University of Leeds.

“The real worry is that that they’re basically saying it’s not going to be so bad, and we’ve got most people vaccinated so let’s just carry on. If you want to actually stop new outbreaks, and the tremendous damage done by this variant, you need to build your vaccine coverage up, to include, in my view, children aged 12 years and above, because that’s where many of the infections are at the moment, but also because there’s lots of socialising going on – and it is about to increase.

“Yes, we may eventually have to live with outbreaks and with some infections, but we’re nowhere near a herd immunity threshold, and it’s not a magic barrier that you go through – it is literally the more the merrier. You need to build that wall of double-vaccinated people, and if you do that you might not need boosters, because if everyone has that level of immunity then there will be no cases.”

Another frustration, among the government’s own advisers, is that ministers have repeatedly ignored their calls to make public spaces safer by improving ventilation.

“It is no good telling people to open windows if windows don’t open, as is the case in many public and private buildings – hence the need for ventilation grants for existing properties and ventilation standards for new builds,” wrote Prof Stephen Reicher and Prof Susan Michie - two members of the Sage subcommittee advising on behavioural science – in a recent [blog](#) for the British Medical Journal. Neither is it any good telling people to avoid stuffy spaces if they don’t know which ones are well-aired, they wrote, or telling the owners of public and private buildings to improve ventilation without regular inspections and enforcement.

To most scientists, living with the virus means doing everything you can to reduce the risks, before taking the brakes off. It doesn’t mean taking the brakes off and just seeing what happens.

2021.07.05 - Coronavirus

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‘Idea of commuting fills me with dread’: workers on returning to the office

Staff warily contemplate going back to work as business leaders say it is vital to boost urban economy

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Passengers arrive at Waterloo station in London last month. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Passengers arrive at Waterloo station in London last month. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Jedidajah Otte

Mon 5 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

With the lifting of coronavirus restrictions in [England](#) probably two weeks away, the prospect of returning to offices means the revival of the daily commute.

In a push to bring back more people to town and city centres to boost the urban economy, a group of [50 business leaders](#), including the Canary Wharf executive chair, Sir George Iacobescu, the bosses of Heathrow and Gatwick airports, the Capita chief executive, Jon Lewis, and the BT chief executive, Philip Jansen, are calling for the government to encourage a return to the office.

The government has already attempted to cajole workers back to the office once before, before Covid cases rose again last September. While some companies, notably banks, have summoned their staff to return to HQ, others have indicated that either remote working, or a hybrid system, is here to stay. This has implications for Britain's previously hard-worked transport networks.

Official figures from the Department for Transport show a gradual rise in recent months of public transport use across the country, with train passengers surpassing half of pre-pandemic levels. However, figures for London underground (where 40-50% of passengers have returned) suggest leisure trips have sprung back more quickly than journeys to work.

But what do commuters think? Despite the [introduction of flexible tickets](#) – in effect a part-time season ticket – the government is not anticipating a full-blown return to workplaces. We asked readers to tell us how they feel about heading back to the office.

‘I used to spend just under £5,000 a year, and never got a seat’



Fatma Mehmet, 39, from Hertfordshire

Fatma Mehmet, a 39-year-old manager working for a local authority, commuted from Hertfordshire to London for work for more than 15 years. “I was clocking up 60 miles a day, five days a week,” she says.

“The time you waste, commuting 10 [journeys] a week – you’ll never get it back. Since I started working from home 15 months ago, I’ve been able to invest this time into work, relationships and hobbies. I’m more productive at home, less distracted and feel well rested each day. I feel less anxious and let down by the constant disruptions I used to endure with my commute.”

Mehmet also does not miss forking out thousands of pounds a year for her train fare on the Great Northern line. “I used to spend just under £5,000 a year, and have never got a seat, so you wonder what you’re paying for. The trains were delayed at least once a week, it all seems completely unfair now and a stress I do not need in my life.

“Flexible tickets aren’t necessarily as flexible and helpful as the train companies say they are, and the thought of commuting again fills me with fear and dread. Thankfully, my employers have been fantastic and allow a flexible hybrid model, and in future, I’d probably like to go in one day a week, at most, just for my mental health and work friendships.

“But if I was forced to return to the office five days a week I would consider leaving my job.”

‘Once it’s safe I want to commute again, I cannot wait’

As much as Mehmet cannot bear the prospect of boarding a train to work again, Owen Fraser, 23, from Aberdeen, is immensely looking forward to it.



Owen Fraser, 23, from Aberdeen, misses listening to the radio on the bus, and visiting the town centre after work

“I used to think my commute was awkward, though I now realise I was complaining about nothing. Remote working was bad for my mental health and I’m going to be a lot more grateful for a commute that allows me to properly mentally adjust to the working day,” he says.

The university student, who deferred for a year to do a work placement, used to commute for up to an hour and a half on buses into the city centre before lockdown forced him to work from home.

“The commute gave me the opportunity to catch up with the day’s events on, say, Radio 4. On my way home, I used to stop off on my local high street, to meet some friends or visit my favourite shops. Some of these, including my local John Lewis, have closed down now, and I’m concerned more will follow due to the rise in remote working and the aggressive promotion of tech giants and many apps as a result.

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m worried as heck about catching Covid on public transport. But once it’s safe I want to commute again, I cannot wait.”

‘There is now no social distancing on buses’



Alex, 35, from Manchester

The prospect of catching the virus on a cramped bus is what has put Alex, 35, an IT test engineer from Manchester, off using public transport to get to work.

“There is now no social distancing on buses and rarely anyone wears a mask properly. On top of that, when the weather is bad all the windows are closed, so there’s no ventilation and fresh air.

“I had whooping cough a few years ago, and the only place I can think I could have caught it at the time is on the bus, where I was packed in tightly with people who were coughing and ill. The pandemic has made me realise what germ-buckets buses are. With mask wearing not enforced in the slightest, I just don’t feel comfortable taking a bus or tram these days.”

Alex is still working from home but will have to go back in from October. “My office is piloting a hybrid scheme, 60% remote working and 40% office. I’ll be going in two days a week.

“I’m a 20-minute walk or a 10-minute car ride away from the office, and I may get a taxi each time, which would cost me about £15 a day. It wouldn’t be a permanent solution but with cases likely to go up again in autumn and winter, I’m in theory prepared to pay that to be safer.

“I would love to cycle to work but, given the lack of proper dedicated cycle lanes, I don’t feel safe doing that either. I have so many friends who have had accidents while cycling on the roads, and near misses due to inconsiderate drivers, which terrifies me.”

‘I’m worried about the cost of even occasional commuting’

Stephen, 50, a product manager from near Cambridge, has been commuting to central London for the past two years.

“When I first started working in London, the commute was hard but it was exciting to be working in the capital, to have an endless variety of lunch options, and to feel connected to the city. I even believed that I would spend my train journeys reading or watching TV.

“The truth is, though, that I was leaving the house shortly after 6am each morning and having to dash out of the office at 4.30pm to get home just in time to put my young children to bed after everyone but me had eaten dinner together.

“My wife was left to do all the school runs, and frantically hurried home from her own job some 15 miles away. It was very tough for her.

“I was exhausted, only eating with my family at the weekends and paying around £5,500 for the privilege. In retrospect, the season ticket was an expense I could barely cover and I certainly couldn’t afford adding underground travel – meaning 25 minutes’ fast walk each way and even more time pressure.

“Apart from the stress of commuting, which isn’t talked about enough, there were all the times the trains were cancelled entirely, or when a whole train was unceremoniously dumped on to a rural station because it wasn’t going any further.”

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The father of two had never been a fan of remote working but cannot imagine going back to his old life.

“Very few people I’ve spoken to are going back in full-time. Going in just two days per week would cost almost the same over the year, in terms of regular peak-time returns, so I’m worried about the cost of even occasional commuting.

“When I return to some kind of presence in the office, it’ll be one day a week.”

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French to get access to Covid jabs on holiday including at the beach

Government changes rule that second jab must be given in same place as first amid rise in Delta cases

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People wearing face masks walk along the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, France. Photograph: Valéry Hache/AFP/Getty Images

People wearing face masks walk along the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, France. Photograph: Valéry Hache/AFP/Getty Images

[Kim Willsher in Paris](#)

Mon 5 Jul 2021 05.53 EDT

French holidaymakers will have access to Covid vaccines wherever they are in the country this summer, the government has announced.

The move, introduced on Monday, follows a dropping-off in the number of first vaccine jabs and warnings of a fourth wave of coronavirus as the rate of [Delta variant infections rises](#).

In [France](#), people often take the entirety of July or August off work, and there have been reports of people postponing their coronavirus jabs due to previous rules that the second dose should be administered in the same place as the first.

Mobile vaccine units are being introduced in popular tourist spots, including beaches.

The health minister, Olivier Véran, had initially opposed loosening the second dose rules because of the difficulty of changing the distribution of vaccine stocks. He also suggested doctors and paramedics in certain holiday hotspots had “other things to do than vaccinate the entire French population during the summer”.

[Chart](#)

He changed his mind after the number of daily infections, which had been dropping, increased. The number rose for a fifth consecutive day on Sunday.

“For the last five days, infections have stopped dropping and begun to rise again due to the Delta variant, which is very contagious.

“The English example shows that a wave is possible from the end of July. We can limit it and limit the impact with health measures, vaccinations and test and trace,” [Véran tweeted](#).

On Sunday, he stressed the importance of getting vaccinated. “We have to go faster. The country is engaged in a race against the clock. Vaccines greatly lower the risk of getting a serious case [of Covid] including the Delta variant.”

“The threat of the Delta variant is real and could come and spoil our holidays and the summer,” Véran added.

Just over a quarter of positive Covid tests in France are the Delta variant and the number of cases has hit a weekly average of 2,500 a day, much lower than new daily cases in the UK but still rising. French health officials say there is also a rise in the Delta variant among those who are fully vaccinated.

According to the latest [official figures](#) from the health ministry, 33.96 million people in France (50.69%) have had at least one Covid-19 vaccine and 22.81 million (34.05%) are fully vaccinated.

Gabriel Attal, the government spokesperson, said at the weekend: “You can go to the beach and also get vaccinated. This summer, the vaccine will come to you.”

He added: “We have to do everything to avoid the epidemic taking off again in France.”

Vaccine slots can be booked on the centralised appointment system [Doctolib](#) and there are also a number of walk-in vaccine centres.

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New York

New York's patchwork recovery masks vast inequities laid bare by Covid



The skyline of New York City and traffic at the Lincoln Tunnel before the Fourth of July holiday. Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

The skyline of New York City and traffic at the Lincoln Tunnel before the Fourth of July holiday. Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

There are signs of renewal in a city that has weathered crisis after crisis, but what its future looks like remains an open question

Edward Helmore in New York

Mon 5 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

For most of the past year, Manhattan's signature yellow cabs have been a rarity on the avenues and cross-streets. Now, as the city picks up and office workers begin to return, they too are returning – but not yet on a pre-pandemic scale. At the same time, the city is gridlocked by traffic.

A patchwork of indicators suggest the recovery from a pandemic that hit hard and early, caused close to 30,000 deaths out of a 8.4-million population and placed the metropolis in an economic deep-freeze will be similarly uneven.

Surface indicators – yellow cabs, packed restaurants, partying NYU students in Washington Square Park, Bruce Springsteen on Broadway – are in their own way merely masks for social and economic disparities already present but laid bare by the onset of the pandemic and corresponding demands for racial and economic equality that followed.

The complexity of New York's recovery will take years to unpick. Before the pandemic Americans spent 5% of their working time at home. By spring 2020 the figure was 60%. It's a seismic shift that has hit office-laden Manhattan particularly hard. The Partnership for [New York](#) City predicts that only 62% of office workers will return, mostly three days a week, by September.

['The resilience has been heroic': New York's undocumented migrants on the pandemic](#)

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Banks, which have mostly ordered a full return to the office, are facing pushback from workers, who point to higher levels of happiness and productivity from working at home. But it is also a way to return production overheads to the labor force. The conflict will take time to resolve and could trigger a crisis in commercial property values if the workers win. According to the brokers Cushman and Wakefield, the past year has seen 18% more leased floor space lost than during the financial crisis of 2007-09.

Tourism, which contributes \$60bn to the city's economy annually, remains anemic, though some of the hardiest of travelers – Italians – seem to be making the trek. The hit to the city's leisure and hospitality sector, [which peaked at 300,000 jobs in December 2019](#), is severe. After dropping to 80,000 in the early months of the pandemic, the numbers have returned to close to 200,000.



Felipe Beltran, 25, gives a salsa lesson to Brianna Davis, 29, at Domino Park in New York City. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

[A statewide report issued on Friday](#) found that New York had lost 2m jobs during the pandemic and unemployment in May stood at 8.2%, far above the pre-pandemic level and well above the [national average of 5.9%](#).

It also found that the leisure and hospitality sector had experienced the steepest decline in income last year, and would probably be the slowest to recover from the crisis. Earnings for jobs in hospitality are nearly 32% below what they were at the end of 2019.

But others have prospered. The report found personal income in New York had risen 12.8%, hitting \$1.6tn in the first quarter of 2021, surpassing pre-pandemic levels and seeing a more than 50% increase from the final quarter of 2020. Income growth, largely due to government pandemic benefits, contributed \$430bn, or 28%, of the total.

At the same time, the movement of people in the city has been profoundly altered. As public transport use dropped, road traffic surged. The New York City area now officially has the worst traffic in the country, according to survey for Texas A&M's Transportation Institute.

The survey says a New York to Newark, New Jersey, driver spent an average 56 hours stuck in traffic last year – worse than the 30-year top-spot holder, Los Angeles. “So if you think things are worse on the road, you’re not imagining it. They are,” the transportation engineer Sam Schwartz [told CBS2’s Dave Carlin](#).

“You can always come back, but you can’t come back all the way,” as Bob Dylan wrote 20 years ago. Such indicators, by definition incomplete, suggests that New York is coming back strongly. The question, posed almost daily in the New York press, turns on whether you’d necessarily want it to.

The city recovered after 9/11, but that, the Manhattan borough historian, Robert Snyder, points out, was only after it was patriotically designated “America’s City” in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The current, polarized political lens through which the city’s economic and social issues, including crime, are viewed, produce a striking, and perhaps typical, lack of coherence.

“New York City’s history is one of crises suffered and crises overcome,” Snyder told the Guardian. Snyder points out that during the waves of cholera epidemic in the early-to-mid-19th century, the city’s population grew fourfold through Irish and Italian immigration.

“The city kept on growing because of its basic strength as a gateway to the North American market and capital city of finances to the slave-labor south. The epidemics were terrible, and they could incite nativism and cause people to flee to the outskirts, but the city’s fundamental strength kept powering it on.”

The death of the city has been declared frequently, said Snyder. After the financial crisis of the 1970s, “we were certain the city was done for then. After 9/11 we were certain it was done for. Again, after the great recession of 2008-9. It’s not to say these crises don’t matter; they do. They alter the course of the city, accelerate changes already under way and cast a light on living conditions. But New York has a long history of overcoming its crises.”

What is undeniable about the pandemic, he says, is how it has exposed the “cruel inequalities of living conditions between white, more affluent residents and people of color, immigrant and lower-income residents. The unfairness of it is clear and people’s sense of that has been sharpened.

“As some people worried about gaining 15lb during Covid, others were worried about getting infected by their next customer, and those people were disproportionately immigrants and people of color living in crowded conditions in which the virus spread more readily.”



‘Kids in public school were denied a year of education and nourishment that they usually get and the effect is horrendous,’ said Petra Moser of New York University. Photograph: Niyi Fote/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Petra Moser, an economist at New York University’s Stern School of Business, says long-term effects of the pandemic will take years to tease out. “The most salient effect is in schooling. The poor kids in public school were hit really hard. They were denied a year of education and nourishment that they usually get and the effect is horrendous.

“You’ve got kids staring at a screen for hours a day for a year. Not only did they lose their teachers for a year, but they may now be able to concentrate less because they haven’t been fed,” Moser adds.

Other aspects of the pandemic that could affect New York's comeback include the role of women, who have dropped out of the workforce in disproportionately high numbers. "This pandemic has the danger of pushing women out, and we're in danger of losing young women with kids who had to stay home. We'll see greater inequality in that area and we'll have to be careful to make sure to encourage them to stay in the workforce or come back."

Concerns about the value of the commercial real estate, says Moser, pale in comparison with the costs incurred during the pandemic in terms of human capital.

"There could be an increase in inequalities unless there are specific policies to help public school kids catch up, and to help mothers who had to cut back on work. The vitality of the city depends on everybody having a fair shot, because the point of living in a place like this is that comes with opportunities."

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Hardship cases could get discounts on UK quarantine hotel bills

Travellers arriving from red list countries will be able to apply for waivers or discounts, papers reveal

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Arrivals from red list countries must pay £1,750 for an adult and £325 for a child for a 10-day stay in a quarantine hotel. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Arrivals from red list countries must pay £1,750 for an adult and £325 for a child for a 10-day stay in a quarantine hotel Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Jamie Grierson Home affairs correspondent

@JamieGrierson

Sun 4 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

Travellers entering the UK from red list countries who suffer financial hardship will be able to apply for waivers or discounts on the cost of mandatory hotel quarantine, lawyers fighting the policy have revealed.

In correspondence seen by the Guardian, UK government lawyers said the Department of Health and Social Care was “currently in the process of refining their scheme to allow persons entering the managed quarantine system to apply for a fee waiver or reduction on the grounds of financial hardship”.

[Vaccines ‘outpaced by variants’, WHO warns, as Delta now in 98 countries](#)
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It costs £1,750 for an adult to stay in a room for the required 10 days of quarantine, with additional adults costing £650 and children aged five to 11 £325.

Arrivals from red list countries, which include India, Pakistan and Turkey, must pay for the mandatory quarantine and face a fine of up to £10,000 or a 10-year prison sentence if they do not provide accurate details about the countries they have visited.

The only provision for significant financial hardship currently available is the chance to apply for a deferred repayment plan when booking, under which the debt is repaid to the government in 12 monthly instalments.

The law firm PGMBM applied for permission to judicially review the hotel quarantine policy, which came into effect on 15 February. The government is now applying for an eight-week stay of proceedings in order to implement

changes to the policy, including a waiver or cost reduction for those in financial hardship.

Taylor Burgess, a PGMBM senior associate, said: “This policy was rushed through parliament and introduced without due thought as to how its one-size-fits-all application would penalise vulnerable citizens and residents. We are very pleased that our challenge has led the government to review the policy, yet it remains frustrating that it has taken legal action for changes to be made.

“Many thousands of people have been subject to exorbitant costs over the past several months or been entirely prevented from undertaking essential travel or returning home because of the financial hardship they would face after paying the costs to quarantine. Now the government wants eight weeks to change this flawed policy. Why must this drag on for those individuals and families who are continuing to suffer from the financial strain of meeting costs for quarantine, and unduly affect many more people?”

Burgess added: “We have asked the government whether they will be undoing the damage caused by this policy by reviewing previously incurred costs retrospectively. There are people that are still suffering months after leaving quarantine after taking out loans or being forced into debt.”

The law firm has instructed the barristers Adam Wagner and Cian Murphy of Doughty Street Chambers to work on the challenge.

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Comedy

Interview

Feel Good's Mae Martin: 'If you put a teenage girl in any industry, people will take advantage'

[Simon Hattenstone](#)



Mae Martin: 'I just wanted to show the messiness and complexity of a situation where you really care about someone who's hurt you.' Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Mae Martin: 'I just wanted to show the messiness and complexity of a situation where you really care about someone who's hurt you.' Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

The non-binary comedian's hit TV show draws heavily on an often troubled life. They talk about addiction at 14, the loving parents who kicked them out, the older men who abused their trust – and the happiness they eventually found



Mon 5 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

At the beginning of the pandemic Mae Martin's first TV series, *Feel Good*, was broadcast [on Channel 4 to great acclaim](#). Just recently, the second series came out [on Netflix to even greater acclaim](#). While most of us have disappeared in lockdown, Martin has become a star.

Feel Good is a disarmingly autobiographical love story. It tells the story of a character called Mae struggling with relationships, addiction, identity and life on the comedy circuit. Mae is attracted to men and women, but to women more, particularly women who identify as straight. The first series focuses on Mae's relationship with Georgina, a teacher who had previously only slept with men and is reluctant to admit to her super-straight, super-posh friends that she and Mae are living together. Mae is a mix of streetwise and naive – reckless, precocious, promiscuous, self-absorbed and a bag of nerves.

By the end of series two both characters have evolved. George is happy with her bisexuality, while Mae changes from she to they, announcing: "I think I'm transgender or non-binary or whatever the term is these days." Mae has also begun to understand that their teenage relationships with older men were abusive and exploitative.

Last week, Martin discovered how popular *Feel Good* is when visiting Trans Pride in London. “It felt amazing. People were being so nice. They were just coming up and talking to me.” Has Martin ever experienced this in the past? “Yes. I guess before *Feel Good* it was once a week-ish, and now it’s a couple of times a day.”

Martin says when strangers approach, they act as if they are friends, asking the most intimate questions. “They feel like they really know me. And the mad thing is they kind of do. So we have deep conversations. They get right into it asking about addiction, relationships and gender.”

It’s not surprising people react like this when you write and star in a TV series using your real name and telling a version of your life story. But this is where things start to get complicated. As Martin reminds me, it is a fictionalised version. So whereas in *Feel Good*, Mae talks about being trans or non-binary, Martin is non-binary but not trans.

The Canadian standup thinks of *Feel Good* as a dramatised version of life 10 to 15 years ago. But while the addiction at the heart of the story goes back that far, the decision to identify as they rather than she is recent. And we’ve not quite done yet with the complications. While most interviewees tell you their life story, Martin is at times reluctant to, because it inevitably leads to a compare-and-contrast with the show, and becomes reductive. “You spend so long crafting what you want to put out there, and what would be the point of doing that if I’m going to go: ‘Actually, *this* is what happened.’”

It may make Martin hard to write about, but it certainly doesn’t make *Feel Good* hard to watch. Martin is right – it is beautifully crafted. The script, by Martin and co-writer Joe Hampson, is spare and by turns funny, romantic, sexy, disturbing and moving; the performances (including Martin as Mae, [Charlotte Ritchie](#) as George and [Lisa Kudrow](#) as Mae’s mother) note perfect. If you mashed the comic absurdities of [Fleabag](#) and [Catastrophe](#) with the erotic intensity of [Normal People](#) you might get something like *Feel Good*.



Martin with Charlotte Ritchie in *Feel Good*. Photograph: Matt Squire/Channel 4

Martin lives in a chic flat in east London. On the floor is a rack of guitars; on the walls are photos of heroes such as the Beatles and Bob Dylan; and at the back of the living room is a cabinet of tiny trinkets, from brass pigs to a Victorian feng shui compass. On stage, Martin jokes about feeling like a member of the boyband Backstreet Boys. Today, at 34, they still could pass as one – beansprout-skinny, lithe and twitchily energetic.

Martin grew up in Toronto to middle-class parents – a British writer father and a Canadian teacher mother. A recurring theme in *Feel Good* is Mae's guilt about coming from privilege. In rehab, Mae meets people who didn't stand a chance in life – they grew up in poverty; their parents were addicts. Both Mae the character and Martin the person were given every chance. Their parents were ex-hippies who gave their two children (Martin has an older brother, who recently completed a PhD) all they could have wanted. They were open-minded, creative and fun. This is where *Feel Good* diverges from reality. The TV series shows far more of the parents' angst than their free spirits.

In one standup monologue, Martin says that their mother drew diagrams for her young child to illustrate everything from the missionary position to anal

sex. On stage, Martin says that on the first day of school, aged four, they told any pupil who would listen how to perform anal sex while delivering the savage blow that Father Christmas didn't exist. Martin admits there was comedic licence there – it wasn't quite the first day, but the essence of it was true. "I was delivering a lot of hard truths to the kids. I was just like: I can't believe we're all living in this charade."

Martin frequently revisits the family setup in standup routines. In one, the family is seated around the breakfast table, their father naked with his huge penis (labelled a "monstrosity" by their mother) dangling under the table. Martin's brother, then a toddler, wanders under the table, and decides to take a bite of this fleshy delight. Martin re-enacts the unearthly scream their father emitted.



Martin at the Edinburgh fringe in 2017. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

How does their father feel that some fans will know of him primarily for the size of his appendage? "I don't think he was thrilled. It mustn't be ideal having your kids telling really personal stuff about you." And how old exactly was your brother when he had a nibble of your father's penis? Now, Martin looks wary and says with an uncomfortable laugh: "Look, I wasn't there. This is a story I have heard. I think you're looking for the scoop!"

In another sketch Martin mentions that the only thing young Mae asked for at Christmas was the right to turn up at the extended family dinner naked. Well actually, Martin says, the reality was somewhat different. “I loved to be naked. I was naked a lot as a kid – it wasn’t just Christmas. That was a joke.” Now I can see why Martin is so reluctant to be asked about the truth of their comedy. Personal comedy is a retelling of reality with bells on. To literalise it is to suffocate it.

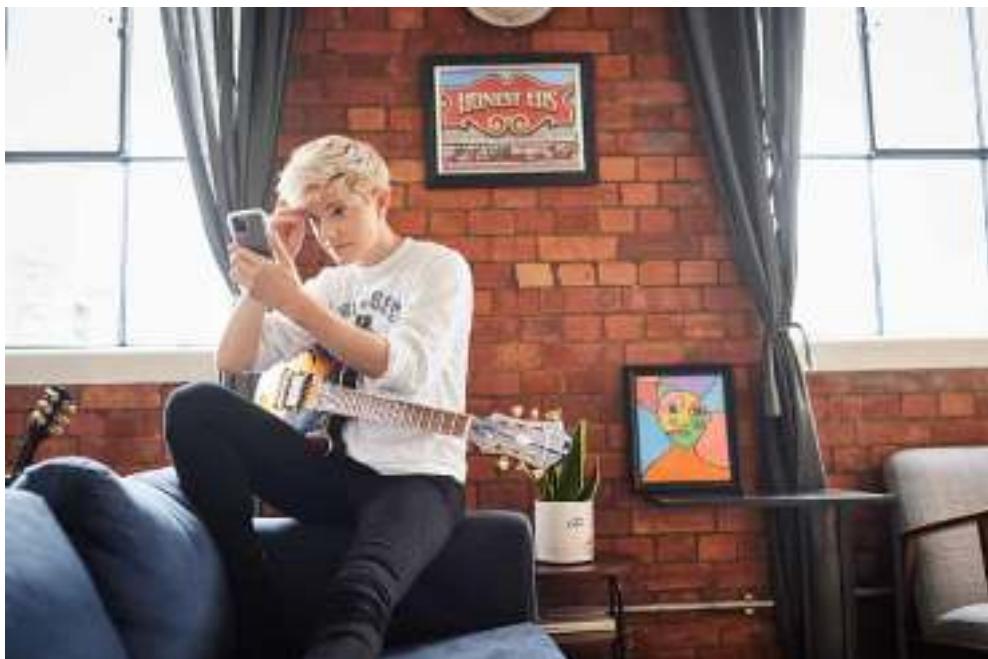
Martin seems happier chatting about day-to-day stuff than trying to deconstruct the past. So an apology for having no milk leads to a conversation about coffee consumption that leads to another about dreams. Out comes their phone, so they can show me the latest in dream technology. “I talk in my sleep, and this app records everything I say,” Martin grins, and starts to play highlights. *“What is the fucking point?”* This is Martin last night, in angry despair while asleep. *“Sorry, I’m just monologuing at you,”* goes the next sleep soundbite. “It sounds like a work situation, trying to pitch something.”

Why did you start doing this, I ask. “Because I often wake myself up talking or people I sleep with say: ‘You’re talking absolute shit.’” Always? “Yeah. This is so weird.” Martin scrolls to the next recording. *“You know who’s killed at alarming rates? Trans women.”* This time, Martin’s voice is deep and distressed. “I don’t sound like myself.” You sound like your mother in *Feel Good*, I say. “I do, actually, that’s true. It’s raw emotion unfiltered.”

Martin is too aware of their own anxiety to be alarmed by all this, and it’s not all horror. “There are lighthearted ones, too. This is the happiest one I’ve got.” Again, Martin scrolls forwards. *“Oh boy, I’ve got a puppee. Wheeeeeeee!”* I’m sure these snippets will make it into a future standup routine.

Martin says their young self was an incorrigible showoff. “I was really extroverted till I started doing comedy full-time. When I was eight I was doing shows at lunch and giving tickets out to the other students. I was doing Ace Ventura impersonations and showing people how many pushups I could do. So irritatingly extroverted. Then as soon as I started doing comedy I calmed down. Now I think I’m pretty introverted. I save all my energy for getting out on stage.”

As a six-year-old, Martin became obsessed with [Bette Midler](#) after seeing her in the film [Hocus Pocus](#). It was one of several obsessions that also included Pee-wee Herman and the Rocky Horror Show. Martin didn't realise it at the time, but now sees it as an expression of an addictive personality. The family adored comedy, and Martin grew up surrounded by their parents' records and videotapes – Monty Python, The Goon Show, Blackadder, Steve Martin. At the age of 11, they went to their first comedy club. "These comedians just seemed like rock stars. I couldn't believe it. A summer camp counsellor said, 'You should be a comedian', and as soon as he said that I thought, 'How do I do it?', and signed up for some classes."



Martin at home in east London. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Along with two school friends, Martin went to the Toronto sketch show Family Circus Maximus 160 times in a single year. Newspaper features were written about the trio, who became known as "the Groupies". Martin began to do their own standup, in school uniform, at 13. "I felt my whole body vibrating with excitement and euphoria. I found the adrenaline addictive, and the camaraderie and the feeling of inclusion into this club of cool people that I admired. I couldn't believe it. It felt amazing." You can sense their euphoria, as Martin recalls it.

Inevitably it had its downside. Many of the adult comics were fuelled by alcohol and drugs. By the age of 14, Martin was boozing, taking cocaine and selling drugs. “My parents had given me a very long leash; then, when I started getting into trouble and dropping out of school, they were very alarmed.” How tough was it for them? “It was really difficult for everybody. We’re so close now, but it was a really difficult time.” Did Martin lie a lot to loved ones? “Yes, I think anybody who has done drugs ends up lying to a lot of people about the things you’re doing for drugs. Very quickly, life became hellish. Nightmarish. I really went all-in. As soon as I started having relationships with older people that I wasn’t emotionally equipped to handle, that caused huge anxiety and then ...” Martin trails off. “I was 14-15. They were like 28-30. And it wasn’t like lots of my friends were doing drugs, it was a very solo thing. Intense and lonely.”

Martin left school at 15. Their parents were distraught. At 16, Martin was full-time at the Second City comedy club in Toronto – in the box office by day to make ends meet; doing standup by night. In the end Martin’s parents threw their troublesome teen out of the home. By then Martin had developed close friendships with comics in their late 20s and early 30s. They offered the prodigy a place to stay and things went from there.

Much of *Feel Good* is anything but. In the second series, Mae re-examines those early relationships, and sees them from a new, disturbing perspective. In one devastating scene Mae visits a former mentor and lover who admits: “You’ve outgrown me.” Mae asks him whether his intentions were always dishonourable when he provided sanctuary. It strikes Mae that rather than being a partner, he was a paedophile preying on vulnerable people. Today, Martin feels there was an inevitability about it all. “If you put a teenage girl in any industry like that, there are going to be people taking advantage. I don’t think it’s specific to comedy. It’s night-time, there’s booze and drugs around.”

Did that conversation with the abuser happen in real life? Martin fidgets and umms and ahhs. “Yeah, but the character’s an amalgamation of two people. I just wanted to show the messiness and complexity of a situation where you really care about someone who’s hurt you. So often it’s shown as black and white – about outing people and people getting revenge, and then everything

is peachy. But actually there are no winners and it's also painful losing a friend."

At what point did you realise the relationship had been abusive? "It was a pretty recent revelation. It was around 2016 when everyone was talking about reframing relationships, and there was that zeitgeisty moment about assault. That made me examine relationships in a way I hadn't understood before."

Martin's tattoos serve as a shorthand for their remarkable life story. They consist of odd words and numbers – 416 is the Toronto phone code; "Oatmeal" was to impress an older woman Martin was besotted with at 16; "Basement" is to remind them never again to live in one; 28/05/07 is a reminder of the date Martin came across a close childhood friend by chance in Nepal, whom they had lost touch with.

Martin eventually got clean at 20. Life was transformed. Martin became more confident, embarked on a five-year relationship with an "amazing woman", moved to England, worked in call centres, dressed as a giant tooth to sell dental pamphlets, and supported non-verbal autistic children. Meanwhile, their writing improved, becoming less sketch-based, more personal. Martin got regular work in clubs, did a couple of TV specials, and then came *Feel Good*.

Martin insists that there will not be a third series, that *Feel Good* has reached its natural conclusion. The show was about its two protagonists finding a way to feel good about themselves. And somehow they got there. To make another series, Martin says, would be a betrayal. "You'd have to undo all this personal growth that the characters have made." So now Martin is writing a thriller with Hampson, preparing for a tour in autumn that may see a return to the character-based sketches of old, and relishing recent success.

Comedy has defined most of Martin's life. It was a means of escape as a child, a catalyst for chaos as a teenager, and has ultimately provided a path to redemption. After 14 years clean, how has Martin changed? "I'm less manic, more aware of my addictive behaviour. That enables me to write about it with a bit of perspective." Does that addictive behaviour express

itself in safer ways now? Martin smiles, more with relief than anything else. “Yes, I think I’m a workaholic these days.”

Feel Good is on Netflix. The first series is also on All 4

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Performance art

Interview

‘I had designed it a little too small’: Abraham Poincheval on spending a week inside a sculpture of himself

[Fleur Macdonald](#)



‘It had a really powerful impact’ ... Abraham Poincheval with his latest work, Hartung. Photograph: Claire Dorn

‘It had a really powerful impact’ ... Abraham Poincheval with his latest work, Hartung. Photograph: Claire Dorn

He’s lived within a boulder, hatched a nest of hen’s eggs, and now plans to encase himself in a beehive. Is this France’s most extreme performance artist – and how does he go to the toilet?

[@fleur_macdonald](#)

Mon 5 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Last month, in a smart gallery in Paris, the back of a sculpture was removed and a man was lifted out. He looked around, disoriented, as his body slowly unfurled. A doctor rushed to his side and, after inspecting him, announced he was in good health. The crowd cheered. He'd been in there for seven days.

[Abraham Poincheval](#), possibly France's most extreme performance artist, specialises in surreal feats of endurance, often in tight spots. He has lived inside a rock for seven days, and a stuffed bear for 13. For this latest work, Hartung, he decided to look at a painting by abstract artist [Hans Hartung](#) for seven days straight. He even built a special contraption for it: an aluminium shell of a man sitting on a block, looking down a large square funnel.



Forced to look: the sculpture from another direction Photograph: Claire Dorn

"It's my double, done with a 3D scanner," says the 49-year-old, who dresses like a teenager on acid. "We made me slightly bigger so I could enter myself." The block functioned as a sitting pit toilet and, in the figure's arms, there was water and food. "The beginning was very hard," says Poincheval, who struggled both to reach his supplies and get them to his mouth. "I had designed it a little too small."



Poincheval on the march in western France. Photograph: Fred Tanneau/AFP/Getty Images

The biggest shock, however, was Hartung's work, a square canvas painted in 1989, the last year of the French-German artist's life. "It had a really powerful impact," says Poincheval. He hardly slept the first "chaotic" night, so disturbed was he by Hartung's thick black trails and splashes on iridescent gold and blue. But the next day things settled down. "One starts to find one's place in the sculpture, to find one's bearings and invent gestures that allow you to function." He compares the experience to "a solo crossing of the Atlantic", his mood veering from calm to anxiety to exhilaration. The painting became a sort of mantra and, to his surprise, was continually in flux. "Things disappeared, others reappeared, colours changed," he says. "It was always moving, like a real landscape."

Poincheval has focused on performance from the very beginning of his career. It was cheaper, for starters. "One has a body," he says, "which is already an amazing thing – a refuge, a means of transport. It receives a lot of information, which it conserves, archives, transcribes."

Pulling his own shelter, he has climbed in the Alps during all four seasons (The Thickness of a Mountain, 2013), walked Brittany wearing the armour of a medieval knight (The Errant Knight, the Man of Absence, 2018) and

has been a living message in a bottle (Bottle, 2015). Slowly the journey became an interior one as he became fascinated by early hermits. Indeed, their efforts make Poincheval seem amateur. Symeon the Stylite, the fifth-century saint, spent 37 years on top of a pillar. “They decided to view the world differently,” he says – it wasn’t so much about withdrawal as a change of perspective. “They were able to give the best account of the world.”

In 2017, Poincheval lived inside a limestone boulder that had space at its centre for him. It was there that he came up with Hartung, having experienced hallucinations that reminded him of the painter’s later exuberant works.



Rock-star artist ... preparing to spend a week inside a boulder. Photograph: Benoit Tessier/Reuters

What effect did his presence, within his creation, have on other visitors looking at Hartung’s work? “They have examined the canvases with much more attention and have interacted with them in a far more lively way,” says Thomas Schlessner, the director of the Hartung-Bergman Foundation, which organised the exhibition. “This performance shows the power the gaze can exert on a work of art, but also the power the artwork can exert on the gaze.” And they tracked this quite literally: Poincheval’s brain activity was

monitored through electrodes on his scalp. Scientists are now analysing the results.

Poincheval felt the power of the gaze especially during Egg, when he sat on a wooden stool in a glass cube for 21 days at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Beneath the seat of the stool was a transparent compartment for a nest of 11 eggs he intended to incubate, his presence adding the 10 degrees of heat necessary. “I was doing the work that a chicken would do,” he says. “But being a human, it’s a bit more complicated.”

He was astonished to find that people spent the best part of an hour watching him. This dynamic fascinated him: “Where is the relationship between the watcher and the work? And what happens – suddenly, chemically – to produce this magic moment?” Thankfully, Poincheval doesn’t over-intellectualise: while he’s happy talking about the gaze, he’s just as happy to answer questions about the practicalities of defecation. (He generally stores it in a special compartment. I sniffed inside Hartung and it didn’t smell.)



Glass half full ... inside a giant bottle. Photograph: Bertrand Langlois/AFP/Getty Images

On the last few days of Egg, Poincheval became convinced that his experiment had failed and, after an awful night's sleep, was ready to

announce that the eggs wouldn't hatch. In the morning, a cleaner seemed to confirm this by warning him one of the eggs had a crack. His heart sunk. Then he noticed a little beak poking out. "The chick had fought all night, like me," he says. On the advice of one of the attendants, whose family kept hens, Poincheval undertook a delicate operation: "I performed a caesarean on the egg." The rest then hatched and they all went to live with Poincheval's parents, perfectly completing this exploration of the family unit.

[Wolfgang Tillmans on space, Brexit and Covid: 'Let's hope we get on a dancefloor soon'](#)

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This summer, the artist is building a refuge on the Saint-Jacques de Compostelle pilgrimage trail in [France](#). From the outside it will look like a giant rock, but the inside will be covered in gold leaf, allowing weary travellers to close their eyes in a gleaming cavern. And next year, Poincheval will encase himself in a beehive, as an exploration of a unit larger than family: society. "The hive is the ideal representation of all societies," he says, "whether during medieval times, antiquity, the Renaissance, modernity, or monarchy."

Seeking transcendence in confined situations has had resonance since spring 2020, but Poincheval doesn't want to draw too many comparisons between his week-long imprisonment and lockdowns. "It's very different," he says. "I want this. I have conceived of this idea of being enclosed. That is different from someone who takes the full brunt of it without a say."

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Spare that flea! How to deal humanely with every common household pest



Tim Dowling ... 'It's easy to get angry with household pests.' Composite: Guardian Design; Linda Nylind/The Guardian; epantha/Getty Images/iStockphoto; Robert Uzzi/Alamy Stock Photo

Tim Dowling ... 'It's easy to get angry with household pests.' Composite: Guardian Design; Linda Nylind/The Guardian; epantha/Getty Images/iStockphoto; Robert Uzzi/Alamy Stock Photo

Is it possible to keep your home free of rats, mice, moths and ants without killing them? And which ones should you get rid of – and which should you learn to live with?



[Tim Dowling](#)

[@IAmTimDowling](#)

Mon 5 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

They turned up in shifts, all through the course of lockdown: mice, ants, weevils, moths, a fox and, on one unhappy occasion, a magpie in the kitchen. I have been obliged to show the door to all manner of wildlife, with varying degrees of success. The magpie was eager to leave. The ants less so. The moths are still with us.

It's easy to get angry with household pests, and sometimes – on encountering a particularly rapacious mouse, say – it's possible to wish them great harm. But most people, I suspect, would rather be as humane as possible when getting rid of invaders. And even when kindness can't stop you killing things, squeamishness often will. Unfortunately, many pest control products still associate effectiveness with lethality. The ant trap I bought says it "destroys ants and their nests!" I really just wanted them off the worktop. Is it possible to keep your home pest-free using only humane, nonlethal means?

The first thing I had to learn about humane pest control is that the people who promote it don't like the word pest. Rodents and insects are all wildlife,

with a vital part to play in our ecosystem. “Commonly, people call them pests, but they have the same right to live on this planet as we do,” says Laura-Lisa Hellwig, campaigns manager at the vegan charity Viva!. “And some of them have been here for a much longer time than we have. Really, we should find a peaceful way to live together instead of eradicating or cruelly killing some of them.”

Step one, then, is to check if you can simply coexist with your would-be pest.

“When people see, you know, a bee nest in their guttering on the side of their house, the first thing they think is: ‘We need to find a way to control that,’” says Kevin Newell, the founder of Humane [Wildlife](#) Solutions, a pioneering nonlethal wildlife control company based in Scotland. He is speaking to me by phone over the peeping of recently rescued baby lesser black-backed gulls, which are temporarily living in his office before being rehomed at a wildlife refuge.

Newell’s answer to a bees’ nest is simple: leave it. “Nine times out of 10, they’re bumblebees, and you can just leave them, they’re not going to cause you any harm.”

Even where intervention is warranted, Newell says, humane methods are often more effective than lethal means, which rarely address the root of the problem. Here, then, is a guide to escorting various pests from your premises in the most polite way possible.



With rodents, the only true solution is prevention. Composite: Guardian Design; Linda Nylind/The Guardian; Ilya731/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Mice and rats

With rodents, the only true solution is prevention – poisoning is not only cruel but ineffective, especially with rats. “If you put poison out for them, they will eat a little bit, go away, see if it’s safe and come back only if it is,” says Hellwig.

It may even make the problem worse. Commonly used poisons are designed to attract rodents, and rats can develop remarkable tolerance to them. Newell cites an example of a Scottish supermarket where conventional exterminators had been refilling poison traps regularly for six years. In between refillings, the rats would get through all the poison and then start back in on the stock. Newell traced their entry point to a broken air vent, blocked it, and the problem was solved permanently.

To rodent-proof your home, you’ll need to do the same thing: find out where they’re getting in, and seal it up. It’s that simple, and, unfortunately, that difficult. An adult mouse can squeeze through a hole the size of a 5p coin. And if you live in a flat, you probably won’t have access to their external entry point, so you’ll need to ringfence your premises from the inside. Look

for droppings and work backwards. Check the gaps where heating and water pipes meet walls and floors. Jamming steel wool into cracks and holes is a good idea, according to Hellwig, because the mice can't chew through it.

If you've got rodents in the house that need catching, use humane live traps with plenty of room inside. "When you're going to trap these animals, the best thing to do is put the traps exactly where they're getting food," says Newell. "And then use the food that they're attracted to. If you imagine they're in your cereal cupboard and they're just eating the Weetabix, there's a reason: they've got a taste for that. So if you remove the Weetabix, crunch one up and put it in the live trap, you're most likely going to catch them the first night." If you don't know what your mice fancy, Newell recommends Nutella as bait: "They love the combination of chocolate and nuts." Check the traps last thing at night and first thing in the morning to ensure that trapped mice don't get too stressed or dehydrated.

If you put poison out for rats, they will eat a little bit, go away and come back only if it's safe

Online advice about setting your caught mice free is confusing: some councils will advise you to take them at least two miles away to stop them returning, while some animal charities claim that a mouse probably won't survive unless it's released within 50 metres of where it was trapped.

Newell says a freed mouse will be fine at this time of year if left somewhere close to a natural water source, food and shelter. "These are the three main things," he says, "so ideally, a riverbank or an old railway line."

Ants

Here's how an invasion proceeds: one little ant will wander into your house through a tiny crack. If she finds some sugar she'll take it back to her nest, leaving by the same route. The next day, she'll return, following her own scent trail. The more often she makes that journey, the stronger the scent she lays down, until other ants begin to follow it. Soon the whole colony is marching into your kitchen single file.

Find their entry point and wait for nightfall. “Because the ants will go into their nest at night – they don’t come out at night to forage,” says Newell. “You just need a simple Polyfilla or something to block that hole up.” Wash down the surrounding area with hot water mixed with lemon juice or vinegar. “If you keep it clean, and you wipe that whole area, you’ll essentially remove their scent trail so they’re back to stage one. Then if you make sure, that same night, to clean your kitchen floor to within an inch of its life, and there’s no food there to be found, even if the ant comes in again, when she doesn’t find anything she’ll simply go back out, and it will be deemed an area where there’s no food for them.”



‘Wasps are no problem at all for most of the year.’ Composite: Guardian Design; Linda Nylind/The Guardian; YAY Media AS/Alamy

Wasps

First, consider the possibility of doing nothing. Wasps are no problem at all for most of the year. “It’s only in the two months in the summer when the females start looking for food, which then would be our picnic. So that’s why they come close to us,” says Hellwig.

Even if you’ve got a waspnest in your attic, you don’t necessarily need to take action. “If you’re not using it, you can just leave them,” says Newell.

“And if you love your garden, they are one of the best gardener’s friends you can have. They eat all the insects that normally would destroy plants.” Left on their own, they will live out their cycle and die out.

Sometimes it’s necessary to remove a nest, especially if a member of your household is allergic to wasps. But you shouldn’t approach a waspnest on your own – even the carbon dioxide from your exhaled breath can trigger their defences.

Newell routinely removes and relocates nests without harming any wasps. He goes in at night, wearing a face mask, and manoeuvres the nest into a big plastic container. Then he finds a tree or an old stone wall where the wasps can adjust to their new surroundings in peace. “This is how I would do it, not how I would advise people to do it,” he says. Best to get a professional in.

Cockroaches

“Cockroaches love wet floors, or anything really moist,” says Hellwig, “so keep spaces dry, so they’re not inviting.” They’re particularly attracted to leaking pipes, which may be the true source of your problem. Poisoning cockroaches is generally not that effective – they’re extraordinarily resilient – but getting rid of them humanely is a big job, even for a professional.

“It is a case of trying to catch as many as possible by hand for release away from households and then deep-cleaning the areas they were living in,” says Newell. “It is also a good idea to make sure all the gaps between walls and floors are sealed up to prevent further re-entry.”

Fleas

“I’ve found ways that I can clear a house full of fleas from cats and dogs without harming the fleas and catching them all,” says Newell, though at the moment his method is still a trade secret. “It involves water and a bowl,” he says. “I won’t say what the magic ingredient is because we’re still trialling at the moment. But from early studies, it seems to be able to catch the fleas

live, so they can't escape, and this is all due to gravity and how water reacts with fleas."

For you and me, he says, the secret is to give your dog or cat a bath regularly, and to vacuum carpets and dog beds frequently to remove flea eggs, bearing in mind that the eggs can still hatch in the vacuum bag, so you need to empty it somewhere outside.

Woodlice, flies and other insects

Newell has a short answer for this: spiders, in particular harvesters, AKA daddy longlegs. "If you've got a couple of them kicking about, keep them around because, yes, they're very spindly, but they're not very scary, and they'll keep your house free of woodlice, silverfish and other creepy crawlies people may not want." If you feel the need to relocate a particular insect – or, if you must, a spider – there are humane catchers on the market, but nothing works better than a glass and a bit of card: trap the subject under the glass, slide the card between the rim and the wall and carry the package to the nearest window.

Foxes

According to Hellwig, peaceful coexistence is your best bet. "Foxes are protected under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, so if you cause any harm to them, you can be fined," he says.

You can pretty much be assured that your cat and the fox are coexisting, and they're very good at it

Newell says most of the calls he gets about foxes are from people who are worried about their cats, but it's likely that by the time you've noticed a fox, he and your cat have already reached an accommodation. "You can pretty much be assured that they're coexisting, and they're very good at it," he says. If foxes are in the habit of digging up your new plants – as they often do mine – it's usually because of the fertiliser; the smell of it leads them to believe there's something to eat down there. If you need to keep foxes out of

your garden, a prickle strip laid along the top of surrounding fences and walls should do the trick. Ultrasonic repellents can also be effective.

Don't listen to anyone who says they can humanely trap a fox and set it free in the countryside for you – Newell says they rarely survive when dropped into a new area. "It's also illegal," he adds. "If you have an animal under your control, it's your responsibility to make sure that animal is going to be safe. And we know that foxes in this situation are not safe."

Moths

Natural deterrents can be effective – Hellwig recommends lavender, mint, thyme and rosemary, either dried or in essential oils – but eradicating a moth problem humanely will take time. It's the larvae that eat your clothes, but the adult moths are the ones you need to catch. "When they emerge, they'll look for a mate straight away," says Newell. "If there's no breeding adults, the population of those moths will stop."

But be warned: this method requires persistence. "I was once in a Buddhist temple where their prayer mats and prayer rugs were being ravaged by moths," says Newell. "They have a cycle, which is between two and four weeks, so I went back every other day to catch the moths. We caught the moths, we put them outside, until there were no more moths emerging. After a couple of weeks, we advised that they wash all their rugs and their prayer mats. And it solved the problem." This nonlethal discipline is all the more impressive when you find out how much a new Tibetan prayer mat can cost.

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Homes destroyed by a storm in New York state in 1962. Photograph: Bettmann/Getty/Guardian Design

[The long read](#)

Sixty years of climate change warnings: the signs that were missed (and ignored)

Homes destroyed by a storm in New York state in 1962. Photograph: Bettmann/Getty/Guardian Design

The effects of ‘weird weather’ were already being felt in the 1960s, but scientists linking fossil fuels with climate change were dismissed as prophets of doom

by [Alice Bell](#)

Mon 5 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

In August 1974, the CIA produced a study on “climatological research as it pertains to intelligence problems”. The diagnosis was dramatic. It warned of the emergence of a new era of weird weather, leading to political unrest and mass migration (which, in turn, would cause more unrest). The new era the agency imagined wasn’t necessarily one of hotter temperatures; the CIA had heard from scientists warning of global cooling as well as warming. But the direction in which the thermometer was travelling wasn’t their immediate concern; it was the political impact. They knew that the so-called “[little ice age](#)”, a series of cold snaps between, roughly, 1350 and 1850, had brought not only drought and famine, but also war – and so could these new climatic changes.

“The climate change began in 1960,” the report’s first page informs us, “but no one, including the climatologists, recognised it.” Crop failures in the Soviet Union and India in the early 1960s had been attributed to standard unlucky weather. The US shipped grain to India and the Soviets killed off livestock to eat, “and premier Nikita Khrushchev was quietly deposed”.

But, the report argued, the world ignored this warning, as the global population continued to grow and states made massive investments in energy, technology and medicine.

Meanwhile, the weird weather rolled on, shifting to a collection of west African countries just below the Sahara. People in Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad “became the first victims of the climate change”, the report argued, but their suffering was masked by other struggles – or the richer parts of the world simply weren’t paying attention. As the

effects of climate change started to spread to other parts of the world, the early 1970s saw reports of droughts, crop failures and floods from Burma, Pakistan, North Korea, Costa Rica, Honduras, Japan, Manila, Ecuador, USSR, China, India and the US. But few people seemed willing to see a pattern: “The headlines from around the world told a story still not fully understood or one we don’t want to face,” the report said.



Floods in Benares, India, circa 1970. Photograph: Paolo KOCH/Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images

This claim that no one was paying attention was not entirely fair. Some scientists had been talking about the issue for a while. It had been in newspapers and on television, and was even mentioned in a speech by US president Lyndon Johnson in 1965. A few months before the CIA report was issued, the US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, had addressed the UN under a banner of applying science to “the problems that science has helped to create”, including his worry that the poorest nations were now threatened with “the possibility of climatic changes in the monsoon belt and perhaps throughout the world”.

Still, the report’s authors had a point: climate change wasn’t getting the attention it could have, and there was a lack of urgency in discussions. There was no large public outcry, nor did anyone seem to be trying to generate one.

Although initially prepared as a classified working paper, the report [ended up](#) in the New York Times a few years later. By this point, February 1977, the problem of burning fossil fuels was seen more through the lens of the domestic oil crisis rather than overseas famine. The climate crisis might still feel remote, the New York Times mused, but as Americans feel the difficulties of unusual weather combined with shortages of oil, perhaps this might unlock some change? The paper reported that both energy and climate experts shared the hope “that the current crisis is severe enough and close enough to home to encourage the interest and planning required to deal with these long-range issues before the problems get too much worse”.

And yet, if anything, debate about climate change in the last third of the 20th century would be characterised as much by delay as concern, not least because of something the political analysts at the CIA seem to have missed: fightback from the fossil fuel industries.

When it came to constructing that delay, the spin doctors could find building materials readily available within the scientific community itself. In 1976, a young climate modeller named Stephen Schneider decided it was time for someone in the climate science community to make a splash. As a graduate student at Columbia University, Schneider wanted to find a research project that could make a difference. While hanging out at the Nasa Goddard Institute for Space Studies, he stumbled across a talk on climate models. He was inspired: “How exciting it was that you could actually simulate something as crazy as the Earth, and then pollute the model, and figure out what might happen – and have some influence on policy in a positive way,” he later recalled.

After years of headlines about droughts and famine, Schneider figured the time was right for a popular science book on the danger climate change could cause. The result was his 1976 book, *The Genesis Strategy*. Although he wanted to avoid positioning himself alongside either what he called the “prophets of doom” on one side or the “Pollyannas” on the other, he felt it was important to impart the gravity of climate change and catch people’s attention.

And attention it got, with a jacket endorsement from physicist Carl Sagan, reviews in the Washington Post and [New York Times](#), and an invitation to appear on Johnny Carson's [Tonight Show](#). This rankled some of the old guard, who felt this just wasn't the way to do science. Schneider's book drew an especially scathing attack from Helmut Landsberg, who had been director of the Weather Bureau's office of climatology, and was now a well-respected professor at the University of Maryland.

Landsberg reviewed the book for the American Geophysical Union, calling it a "wide-ranging potpourri of science, nature and politics", and "multidisciplinary, as promised, but also very undisciplined". Landsberg disliked what he saw as an activist spirit in Schneider, believing that climate scientists should stay out of the public spotlight, especially when it came to the uncertainties of climate modelling. He would only endanger the credibility of climatologists, Landsberg worried; much better to stay collecting data to iron out as many uncertainties as possible, only guardedly briefing politicians behind closed doors when absolutely needed. In an example of first-class scientific bitching, Landsberg concluded his review by noting that Schneider advocated scientists running for public office, and that perhaps he had better try that himself – but that if he did want to be a serious scientist, "one might suggest that he spend less time going to the large number of meetings and workshops that he seems to frequent" and join a scientific library.



Nomads pick up bran sticks dropped by the French airforce, during a 1974 drought in Sahel, south of the Sahara Desert. Photograph: Alain Nogues/Sygma/Getty Images

In part, it was a generational clash. Schneider belonged to a younger, more rebellious cohort, happy to take science to the streets. In contrast, Landsberg had spent a career working carefully with government and the military, generally behind closed doors, and was scared that public involvement might disrupt the delicate balance of this relationship. What's more, the cultural norms of scientific behaviour that expect a "good" scientist to be guarded and avoid anything that smells remotely of drama were deeply embedded – even when, like any deeply embedded cultural norm, they can skew the science. Landsberg was far from the only established meteorologist bristling at all this new attention given to climate change. Some felt uneasy about the drama, while others didn't trust the new technologies, disciplines and approaches being used.

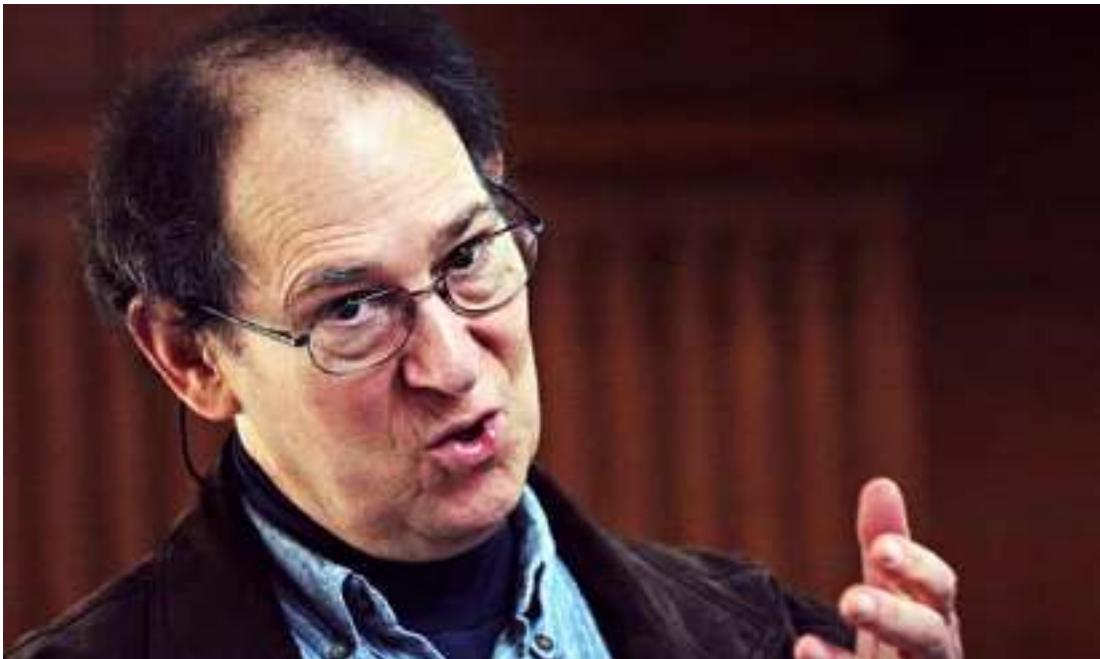
In the UK, the head of the Met Office, John Mason, called concern about climate change a "bandwagon" and set about trying to "debunk alarmist US views". In 1977 he gave a public talk at the Royal Society of Arts, stressing that there were always fluctuations in climate, and that the recent droughts were not unprecedented.

He agreed that if we were to continue to burn fossil fuels at the rate we were, we might have 1C warming, which he thought was “significant”, in the next 50-100 years; but on the whole, he thought, the atmosphere was a system that would take whatever we threw at it. Plus, like many of his contemporaries, he figured we would all move over to nuclear power, anyway. Writing up the talk for Nature, John Gribbin described the overall message as “don’t panic”. He reassured readers there was no need to listen to “the prophets of doom”.

Change was coming, though, and it would be a combination of an establishment scientist and an activist that would kick it off . An obscure 1978 US Environmental Protection Agency report on coal ended up on the desk of Rafe Pomerance, a lobbyist at the DC offices of Friends of the Earth. It mentioned the “greenhouse effect”, noting that fossil fuels could have significant and damaging impacts on the atmosphere in the next few decades.

He asked around the office and someone handed him a recent newspaper article by a geophysicist called Gordon MacDonald. MacDonald was a high-ranking American scientist who had worked on weather modification in the 1960s as an advisor to Johnson. In 1968 he had written an essay called [How to Wreck the Environment](#), imagining a future in which we had resolved threats of nuclear war but instead weaponised the weather. Since then he had watched people do this – not deliberately, as a means of war, but more carelessly, simply by continuing to burn fossil fuels.

More importantly, MacDonald was also a “Jason” – a member of a [secret group](#) of elite scientists who met regularly to give the government advice, outside of the public eye. The Jason group had met to discuss carbon dioxide and climate change in the summers of 1977 and 1978, and MacDonald had appeared on US TV to argue that the earth was warming.



Professor Stephen Schneider talks at Stanford University in 2008.
Photograph: ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy

You might imagine there was some culture clash between Pomerance, a Friends of the Earth lobbyist, and MacDonald, a secret military scientist, but they made a powerful team. They got a meeting with Frank Press, the president's science advisor, who brought along the entire senior staff of the US Office of Science and Technology. After MacDonald outlined his case, Press said he would ask the former head of the meteorology department at MIT, Jule Charney, to look into it. If Charney said a climate apocalypse was coming, the president would act.

Charney summoned a team of scientists and officials, along with their families, to a large mansion at Woods Hole, on the south-western spur of Cape Cod. Charney's brief was to assemble atmospheric scientists to check the Jasons' report, and he invited two leading climate modellers to present the results of their more detailed, richer models: James Hansen at the Goddard Institute for Space Studies at Columbia University in New York, and Syukuro Manabe of the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Lab in Princeton.

The scientific proceedings were held in the old carriage house of the mansion, with the scientists on a rectangle of desks in the middle and political observers around the side. They dryly reviewed principles of

atmospheric science and dialled in Hansen and Manabe. The two models offered slightly different warnings about the future, and in the end, Charney's group decided to split the difference. They felt able to say with confidence that the Earth would warm by about 3C in the next century, plus or minus 50% (that is, we would see warming between 1.5C or 4C). In their report of November 1979, *Science* magazine declared: "Gloomsday predictions have no fault."

By the mid-1970s, the biggest oil company in the world, Exxon, was starting to wonder if climate change might finally be about to arrive on the political agenda and start messing with its business model. Maybe it was the reference in the Kissinger speech, or Schneider's appearance on the *Tonight Show*. Or maybe it was just that the year 2000 – the point after which scientists warned things were going to start to hurt – didn't seem quite so far off.

In the summer of 1977, James Black, one of the top science advisors at Exxon, made a presentation on the greenhouse effect to the company's most senior staff. This was a big deal: executives at that level would only want to know about science that would affect the bottom line. The same year, the company hired Edward David Jr to head up their research labs. He had learned about climate change while working as an advisor to Nixon. Under David, Exxon started to build a small research project on carbon dioxide. Small, at least, by Exxon standards – at \$1m a year, it was a good chunk of cash, just not much compared with the \$300m a year the company spent on research at large.

In December 1978, Henry Shaw, the scientist leading Exxon's carbon dioxide research, wrote in a letter to David that Exxon "must develop a credible scientific team" one that can critically evaluate science that comes in on the topic, and "be able to carry bad news, if any, to the corporation".



Starving cattle roam a cracked landscape in Mauritania in search of water, 1978. Photograph: Alain Nogues/Sygma/Getty Images

Exxon fitted out one of its largest supertankers with custom-made instruments to do ocean research. Exxon wanted to be taken seriously as a credible player, so wanted leading scientists on board, and was willing to ensure they had scientific freedom. Indeed, some of the work they undertook with oceanographer Taro Takahashi would be later used in a 2009 paper concluding that the oceans absorb only 20% of carbon dioxide emitted from human activities. This work earned Takahashi a Champion of the Earth prize from the UN.

In October 1982, David told a global warming conference financed by Exxon: “Few people doubt that the world has entered an energy transition, away from dependence upon fossil fuels and toward some mix of renewable resources that will not pose problems of CO₂ accumulation.”

The only question, he said, was how fast this would happen. Maybe he really saw Exxon as about to lead the way on innovation to zero-carbon fuels, with his R&D lab at the centre of it. Or maybe the enormity of the challenge hadn’t really sunk in. Either way, by the mid-1980s the carbon dioxide research had largely dried up.

When Ronald Reagan was elected in November 1980, he appointed lawyer James G Watt to run the Department of the Interior. Watt had headed a legal firm that fought to open public lands for drilling and mining, and already had a reputation for hating conservation projects, as a matter of policy and of faith. He once famously described environmentalism as “a leftwing cult dedicated to bringing down the type of government I believe in”. The head of the National Coal Association pronounced himself “deliriously happy” at the appointment, and corporate lobbyists started joking: “How much power does it take to stop a million environmentalists? One Watt.”

Watt didn’t close the EPA, as people initially feared he would, but he did appoint Anne Gorsuch, an anti-regulation zealot who cut it by a quarter. Pomerance and his colleagues in the environmental movement were going to be busy. They didn’t exactly have much time for picking up that lingering and still quite abstract problem of climate change. It would still be a while before Pomerance would see a public movement for climate action.

Just before the November 1980 election, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) had set up a new Carbon Dioxide Assessment Committee to do a follow-up to the Charney report. The chair was Bill Nierenberg, one of the generation of scientists who, like Helmut Landsberg, had been through both the war and the subsequent boom in science funding. He was quite at home working with the government and military. He was even a Jason. He had been a fierce defender of the Vietnam war, which had set him apart from some of his colleagues, and he was still bitter about some of the leftwing protests on campus at the end of the 1960s, and the pushback against military-sponsored science that they had inspired. He also hated the environmentalist movement, which he saw as a band of Luddites, especially on the issue of nuclear power. In many ways, he must have seemed like the perfect person to lead a review that would report back to the new President Reagan.



Firefighters at work in Torres del Paine National Park, Chile, in 2012.
Photograph: STR/AP

Nierenberg decided to build his report around a mix of economics and science. In theory, this should have been brilliant. But when it came to publication, the two sides did not cohere. The writers had not worked together, but rather been sent off to be scientists in one corner and economists in another. It has been described as a report of two quite different views – five chapters by scientists that agreed global warming was a major problem, and then two more by economists that focused on the uncertainty that still existed about the physical impacts, especially beyond the year 2000, and even greater uncertainty about how this would play out economically. What's more, it was the economists' take on things that got to frame the report, as the first and last chapters, and whose analysis dominated the overall message. Nierenberg seemed to be advocating a wait-and-see approach. There is no particular solution to the problem, he argued at the start of the report, but we can't avoid it: "We simply must learn to deal more effectively with their twists and turns as they unfold."

For their 2010 book about climate scepticism, [Merchants of Doubt](#), Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway dug out the peer-review notes on Nierenberg's report from the NAS archives. One of the reviews was from Alvin Weinberg, a physicist who had been raising concerns about climate change

since the 1970s, and he was less than impressed. In fact, it might be better to say he was appalled by the stance Nierenberg had taken. At one point the report had suggested people would probably adapt, largely by moving. People had migrated because of climate change in the past, it argued, and they would manage again: “It is extraordinary how adaptable people can be,” the report muses.

Weinberg was scathing: “Does the committee really believe the United States or Western Europe or Canada would accept the huge influx of refugees from poor countries that have suffered a drastic shift in rainfall pattern?” Oreskes and Conway did some digging into the reviews and noted that Weinberg’s was not the only negative one (although the others were slightly more polite). Puzzled as to why these criticisms were not responded to, a senior scientist later explained to them: “Academy review was much more lax in those days.”

In the end, the report was launched in October 1983, at a formal gala with cocktails and dinner at the NAS’s cathedral-like Great Hall. Peabody Coal, General Motors and Exxon were all on the invite list – and Pomerance managed to sneak in via the press conference. The White House had briefed the Academy from the get-go, making it clear it did not approve of speculative, alarmist or “wolf-crying” scenarios; that it thought technology would find the answer and it did not expect to do anything other than fund research and see what happened. The NAS knew these people would be in charge for the next few years, and possibly figured that the best idea was to give them the most scientific version they could find of what the White House wanted. Or possibly it simply was what Nierenberg believed. Either way, from the perspective of today, it’s hard not to see it as a big misstep.

The report’s introduction stated up front: “Our stance is conservative: we believe there is reason for caution, not panic.” At the press conference, Roger Revelle, the first scientist to brief Congress on the climate crisis, back in 1957, told reporters they were flashing an amber light, not a red one. And so, the Wall Street Journal reported: “A panel of top scientists has some advice for people worried about the much-publicised warming of the Earth’s climate: you can cope.”

Where were the activists in all of this? Where was that big public movement for action on climate change that campaigners such as Pomerance were longing for? Environmental groups were booming, both in mainstream NGOs and more radical groups, but they tended to focus on other environmental issues, such as saving the whale or the rainforests, or fighting road-building. It wasn't really until the 2000s that we saw the emergence of climate-specific groups and climate dominating the larger NGOs' portfolios.

If anything, the first really active, explicit climate campaigners were the sceptics. Climate scepticism is as old as climate science itself, and in the early days it was an entirely sensible position. It is normal for scientists to raise a quizzical eyebrow when something new is presented to them. The oil industry took this natural scientific scepticism and tapped it.



A flooded farm Hato Grande on the northern outskirts of Bogota, Colombia. 2011. Photograph: William Fernando Martinez/AP

But just as the consensus about the greenhouse effect was starting to harden, and the sceptics starting to fall away, in the 1980s, there was a deliberate, organised effort to amplify that natural doubt, extend it, and use it to dismiss and distract from warnings to take action on climate change. And that wasn't science, even if on occasion it used scientists – that was PR. It did not necessarily mean creating phoney science. (That could work, too, but would

only get you so far.) You would fund real scientists, but in a way that would confuse and muddy the message. They had done this before, with air pollution in the 1940s, and their PR companies had picked up a trick or two from fights about the links between tobacco and cancer.

The chief executives of the major oil companies met and agreed to set aside funds – only \$100,000 for now, but it would grow – to work on climate policy, establishing the very legitimate-sounding Global Climate Coalition. Before long, groups such as this started to proliferate – the Information Council on the Environment, the Cooler Heads Coalition, the Global Climate Information Project – and any science-smelling voice expressing sceptical views was amplified. Bill Nierenberg was a particular favourite. The delayers knew their best strategy was to get involved in the scientific and policy debate – it was there that they would be best placed to push the uncertainties and question regulations. Sometimes fossil fuel companies and their defenders get painted as “anti-science”. In truth they run on science, and always have done – they are just strategic about which bits of it they use.

One of the hardest parts of writing about the history of the climate crisis was stumbling across warnings from the 1950s, 60s and 70s, musing about how things might get bad sometime after the year 2000 if no one did anything about fossil fuels. They still had hope back then. Reading that hope today hurts.

We are now living our ancestors’ nightmares, and it didn’t have to be this way. If we are looking to apportion blame, it is those who deliberately peddled doubt that should be first in line. But it is also worth looking at the cultures of scientific work that have developed over centuries, some of which could do with an update. The doubt-mongers manipulated positive forces in science – such as scepticism – for their own ends, but they also made use of other resources, exacerbating generational divides, exploiting the scientific community’s tendency to avoid drama, and steering notions about who were legitimate political partners (eg governments) and who were not (activists).

Scientists working on climate change have been put in an incredibly difficult position. They should have been given time, expert support and a decent budget to think about the multiple challenges and transformations that happen when you take a contentious bit of science out of the scientific community and put it in the public sphere. They should have been given that support from government, but they also needed the gatekeepers within the scientific community to help them, too. And yet, if anything, many of these scientists have been ridiculed by their colleagues for speaking to media or – perish the thought – showing emotion.

[How climate scepticism turned into something more dangerous](#)

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As citizens of the 21st century, we have inherited an almighty mess, but we have also inherited a lot of tools that could help us and others survive. A star among these tools – sparkling alongside solar panels, [heat pumps](#), policy systems and activist groups – is modern climate science. It really wasn't all that long ago that our ancestors simply looked at air and thought it was just that – thin air – rather than an array of different chemicals; chemicals that you breathe in or out, that you might set fire to or could get high on, or that might, over several centuries of burning fossil fuels, have a warming effect on the Earth.

When climate fear starts to grip, it is worth remembering that we have knowledge that offers us a chance to act. We could, all too easily, be sitting around thinking: “The weather’s a bit weird today. Again.”

This is an edited extract from [Our Biggest Experiment: An Epic History of the Climate Crisis](#) by Alice Bell, published on 8 July by Bloomsbury and available at guardianbookshop.co.uk

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Is it time to begin rewilding the seas?



A zebra shark (*Stegostoma tigrinum*) off the Maldives in the Indian Ocean. A project to reintroduce this endangered species to West Papua begins in November. Photograph: imageBroker/Alamy

A zebra shark (*Stegostoma tigrinum*) off the Maldives in the Indian Ocean. A project to reintroduce this endangered species to West Papua begins in November. Photograph: imageBroker/Alamy

From giant clams to zebra shark, marine biologists want to replace lost and vanishing species at sea but face unique obstacles – not least rampant overfishing

Helen Scales

Sun 4 Jul 2021 06.00 EDT

Kneeling on the seabed a few metres underwater, I pick up a clam and begin gently cleaning its furrowed, porcelain smile with a toothbrush. It's a giant clam but a young one and still just a handful. Here in Fiji, giant clams or *vasua* as they are known, were so heavily overfished for their meat and shells that by the 1980s they were thought to be extinct locally. Australian clams were imported to start a captive breeding programme, and subsequent

generations of their offspring have been released on coral reefs across Fiji. They're still vulnerable to fishing and poaching, but if carefully guarded the giant clams do well and have become symbols of healthy corals reefs inside well-managed marine protected areas.

A key to their early survival is rearing them in cages to keep them safe from predators until they're large enough to survive by themselves. However, the cages also exclude herbivorous fish, so the clams can easily get overgrown by seaweed, which is where the regular toothbrushing comes in.

Giant clam reintroduction is a relatively rare case of what on land might be called rewilding. When it comes to putting back lost and vanishing species, be it [Yellowstone wolves](#) or [British beavers](#), the underwater realm has been trailing behind its terrestrial counterparts. With no firm definition, initiatives to replant seagrass meadows and re-establish extinct oyster reefs arguably come under the rewilding umbrella. But the notion of returning large, charismatic animals to the ocean is only just beginning to catch on. There are lots of ideas, such as bringing back grey whales to the Atlantic, or [Dalmatian pelicans to the UK](#), but so far only a few have actually been tried out. This reluctance comes down, in part, to a lack of captive-bred marine animals to release into the wild.

Guarding a giant clam that stays put is difficult enough; preventing other species from swimming straight into a fishing net is another matter

“There’s not a lot of them that are propagated or bred and successfully reared in human care,” says Julie Levans from Virginia Aquarium, about 150 miles south of Washington DC. “Unless you’re taking animals from one place and putting them in the other place in the ocean, you don’t really have that many options.”

For many aquatic animals, captive breeding and rewilding are just not going to happen. We’ll probably never see animals such as great white sharks or hammerheads or narwhals living and breeding in aquariums, then being released to the wild. Attempts to bring the last few vaquita porpoises into captivity from the Gulf of California went horribly wrong in 2017, when one

panicked and had to be immediately set free, and a second swiftly died of a stress-induced heart attack.

In plenty of cases, ocean reintroductions shouldn't be necessary because the seas have a tremendous capacity to rewild themselves, given a chance. Leave alone areas of the ocean where fishing and other threats are curtailed and marine populations should bounce back. But there are some cases where particular species may benefit from extra help.

The Raja Ampat Islands in the West Papua province of Indonesia could soon become the site of the world's first release of captive-bred sharks. The species in question is the zebra shark (*Stegostoma tigrinum*), known as the leopard shark locally, which is classified as endangered largely due to overfishing, in particular to meet rising demand for shark fin soup.



In the 1980s giant clams were thought to be extinct around Fiji but captive breeding and careful reef management have helped to establish new colonies. Photograph: John De Mello/Alamy

As a target for rewilding, the zebra shark has several things going for it. First, it's one of only a few elasmobranchs that breed well in captivity. Second, rather than giving birth to live young, zebra sharks lay egg cases, which are far simpler and safer to ship around the planet. It's a species that is

not doing well in the waters around Raja Ampat, which are inside marine-protected areas and already off limits to fishing boats.

“A lot of the other shark and ray species have recovered from the fisheries back in the early 90s,” says Levans, who is involved in the [*Stegostoma tigrinum Augmentation and Recovery \(StAR\) project*](#). “The zebra sharks unfortunately have not.”

These spotted, snub-nosed sharks seem to have been so severely overfished around Raja Ampat that not enough individuals remain for the species to recover unaided. Computer models suggest that sharks released to the area would kickstart the population.

All being well, in November this year zebra shark egg cases will be taken from zoos and aquariums and transported to hatcheries based at the resort of Misool and the Raja Ampat Research and [Conservation](#) Centre. The new arrivals are destined to become a poster species for sustainable tourism.

Species in most land-based rewilding efforts are no longer targeted for pelts or meat. In the ocean, intensive hunting continues

“People from other countries will come to Raja Ampat to see this charismatic creature,” says Prof Charlie Heatubun, head of the research and development agency at the provincial government of West Papua, a key partner in the reintroduction efforts. For tourists, the shark pups swimming in their open-water pens will be a star attraction before they are released to the ocean.

On the other side of the world, elasmobranchs are the focus for a much longer-term plan to restore missing animals. Flapper skates are flat, diamond-shaped relatives of sharks with a two-metre wing span. As Gijs van Zonneveld from ARK Natuurontwikkeling, in the Netherlands, says: “They’re like manta rays.” Highly vulnerable to trawling from the moment they hatch out of their handspan-sized egg cases, these giants are critically endangered and have become exceedingly rare in the North Sea. Van Zonneveld is spearheading an initiative with WWF Netherlands to rewild the

North Sea including, they hope, the comeback of flapper skates. He says: "For us, it is very important that flapper skates can return by about 2030."

The first step Van Zonneveld and colleagues are taking is to work out whether the skates could make their own way into Dutch parts of the North Sea, with individuals migrating from their only remaining strongholds around Shetland and Orkney and the west coast of Scotland. If that proves unlikely, the next step will be to consider the possibility of releasing captive-bred skates. But that is a long way off.

Currently, there are no flapper skates in captivity, and even if there were, it would be a long time before a breeding population could be established. In October 2020, a baby flapper emerged from its egg case at an aquarium in Oban after it was laid on the deck of a fishing boat by a female skate who was caught and subsequently released alive back to the sea. The egg had taken 535 days to hatch.

Then there is the crucial challenge that would await any captive-bred flapper skates or any other animals that might one day be released to the ocean. Species involved in most land-based rewilding efforts are by and large no longer targeted for their pelts or meat. In the ocean, however, intensive hunting of wild animals continues.



Last year, after 535 days in its egg case, a flapper skate (*Dipturus intermedius*) hatched in captivity for the first time. They have been listed as critically endangered since 2006. Photograph: NatureScot Marine/Scottish Association for Marine Science/BBC

“We have an awful lot we need to achieve through fisheries management, as an immediate priority,” says Ali Hood, director of the Shark Trust. Even within marine protected areas, animals such as flapper skates may not be safe from getting caught in trawl nets, [which still operate in many of these zones.](#)

Until intensive fishing pressure is addressed in the North Sea, no flapper skates will be released. Van Zonneveld sees the answer as lying partly in helping the fishing industry to adapt its gear and avoid catching them in the first place, and to release them carefully if they do. He says: “What we’re trying to do when we’re bringing back the flapper skate is to forge new relationships between the users of the North Sea and the ecology of the North Sea.”

Another mobile, ocean-going species has already been released from captivity in massive numbers. Growing up to six metres, the length of an orca, European sea sturgeon have been hunted across Europe for centuries, mostly for their meat rather than eggs, for which their sister species further east, such as sevruga and [beluga](#), are highly prized. Like salmon, the fish spend their adult lives at sea before swimming up rivers to spawn, although unlike salmon they keep mating throughout their centenarian lives, sometimes actively straying into different rivers.

The last time they were seen spawning was in the Gironde estuary in France in 1994. In an attempt to return them to their former glory, about 1.6m captive-reared young sturgeon have been released across Europe in the past decade or so. That’s roughly the time it takes for sturgeon to reach maturity, which means, as Rory Moore from BLUE Marine Foundation says: “We may have fish coming back to spawn very soon.”

Moore and his colleague Alex Hubberstey are part of the newly formed UK Sturgeon Alliance, a group working towards seeing sturgeon swimming once again through Europe’s waterways, including in their former ranges

across the UK. Moore says: “We really have a responsibility to make sure that our rivers are suitable for them to return.”



A European sturgeon, *Acipenser sturio*. In the past decade around 1.6m of the fish have been reared and released. The hope is that the species will return to its former spawning grounds. Photograph: Paulo Oliveira/Alamy

This summer, Moore and Hubberstey will search the Rivers Wye, Towy (or Tywi in Welsh) and Severn for suitable sturgeon spawning grounds. Sturgeon chiefly need gravel beds of the right consistency to lay their eggs. The scientists will also gather samples of environmental or eDNA from the water and riverbed mud to see if the right kinds of invertebrate prey are present for sturgeon to eat – they are bottom feeders – and to look for sturgeon themselves. Fish shed fragments of skin and cells in the water. “It would just be amazing,” says Moore, “if we found a hint of a sturgeon out there.”

The next stage will involve working out where sturgeon need help negotiating weirs that stand between them and their spawning grounds. Time will tell how many released sturgeon have survived their sea-based youth, and whether the great spawning runs will recommence, but a few are already showing up. In August last year, a tagged French sturgeon was caught off the

Devon coast, demonstrating the interconnected nature of this kind of aquatic rewilding.

“One of the hopes is that, eventually, every major river that has available habitat and is connected will have a healthy sturgeon population in it, with sturgeon coming back and forth from Europe,” says Hubberstey. And as they do, the sturgeon will have to run the gauntlet of fisheries.

“There are still many questions with respect to the reality of rewilding programmes for mobile marine species,” says Hood. Guarding a giant clam that stays put is difficult enough, but preventing other released species from swimming straight into a fishing net is another matter entirely. The intentions of captive breeding and release efforts, Hood says, need to extend beyond the moment of release, throughout the long lives of individual animals and on to future generations. She says: “This is a challenging task in an ocean rife with overfishing.”

- Dr Helen Scales is a marine biologist, diver, surfer and author of *The Brilliant Abyss: True Tales of Exploring the Deep Sea, Discovering Hidden Life and Selling the Seabed* (Bloomsbury Sigma, £16.99). To support The Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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Keir Starmer needs a vision. ‘Buy British’ is not enough

[John Harris](#)



It should not be difficult. Covid has highlighted a new public mood, and the injustices caused by a decade of Tory government



‘Keir Starmer and his team have a (possibly last) chance to be heard. So what should they say?’ Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

‘Keir Starmer and his team have a (possibly last) chance to be heard. So what should they say?’ Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Mon 5 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Midway through her campaign to be the MP for Batley and Spen, Kim Leadbeater put up a 90-second [online video](#). It was a bog-standard tumble through the kind of things that parties tend to bang on about in by-elections: pledges of “a reduction in antisocial behaviour”, “more police on our streets” and “better, safer roads”, along with a drive to “protect our green spaces”. But when she suddenly mentioned “international concerns around Palestine” – something presumably inserted to try to stem the flow of votes to George Galloway – one of her party’s [biggest problems](#) was revealed.

Between the doorstep and the occupied West Bank, there was a very familiar Labour vacuum, which 15 months of Keir Starmer’s leadership has left unfilled, and which partly explains why his party came so close to losing its second by-election in two months. In the haze of relief that followed [Leadbeater’s unexpected win](#), these failures seemed to be temporarily forgotten. But they will soon come roaring back.

Complaints about Labour's [lack of "narrative"](#) are now so familiar as to be aching cliches. Clearly, if the party has no language in its collective lungs, that is only symptomatic of [deeper problems](#) that Starmer has so far ignored. The list is long: the fact that Labour can no longer monopolise the politics of the left; the dwindling of the party's old power bases in industry and the trade unions; its lack of a meaningful presence in plenty of its supposed heartlands, and the resulting sense of the party leadership in Westminster being a distant clique.

But in the short to medium term, the tectonic aspects of Labour's weakness will have to wait. Right now, given the breathing space afforded by the narrow win in West Yorkshire, Starmer and his team might have a (possibly last) chance to be heard. So what should they say?

Over the weekend, the Labour leader announced a [new policy](#) on the public sector "buying British", and a public relations drive on crime. Depending on your point of view, those things will either represent necessary action on some of Labour's weaknesses, or a grimly familiar resort to faux patriotism and "toughness". But neither suggest any kind of confident story about what Britain has recently experienced, nor a vision of where it should be heading; a cynical public will either not notice, or see such manoeuvring as proof that the people who run the party are still very anxious.

[Analysis: why is the narrow Labour byelection victory in Batley and Spen being treated as a comeback?](#)

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Richer political seams should not be hard to come by. Particularly in England, where the Covid crisis has highlighted two key things: the panicked incompetence of the people at the top, and the kind of injustices that a decade of Tory-led governments has made immeasurably worse. We now know, for example, that the death rate from Covid in some areas of England has been [25% higher](#) than the national average, and that the impossibility of home working for millions of people has increased their exposure to the virus, with awful consequences. Thanks to Marcus Rashford, the everyday prevalence of hunger has permeated the collective consciousness; the fact that [6 million people](#) now have experience of universal credit has further exposed the cruelties of the benefits system.

The [New Labour veterans](#) who seem to be advising Starmer might deem such themes not nearly “aspirational” enough, and they may not suit the Labour leader’s forensic, lawyerly style. But the key to their potential cut-through – not least in so-called red wall places – lies in the stark distinction between the people at the top (and the unfairnesses they so blithely create or tolerate), and the public (whose conduct throughout the crisis has been exemplary and big-hearted).

People have not just followed the rules, but done their bit for those who have been suffering. Very different behaviour, by contrast, has been crystallised in Matt Hancock’s infamous clinch, Dominic Cummings’ drive up north and the apparent insiderism involved in [appointments](#) and [government contracts](#).

With the right rhetorical skill, there are lines to be drawn, from the brazen privilege those transgressions capture, to policy that would lead us in the opposite direction: on housing; insecurity at work; the gaping holes in our welfare state; and, one of the most overlooked aspects of life in 2021, the ongoing crisis in the lives of our children, in school and beyond.

Starmer has acknowledged most of these things, but never developed a story around them. They ought to be fleshed out using a moral vocabulary: an insistence that the fabled “British people” are better than the chancers who lead them, and deserve to live in a country “where your child in distress is my child, your parent ill and in pain is my parent, your friend unemployed and helpless is my friend, your neighbour, my neighbour”. Before he embraced disastrous foreign interventions and a zeal for privatisation, Tony Blair [said just that](#): his claim that such a vision represented “the true patriotism of a nation” now sounds, in the context of Starmer’s leadership, like an insistence that speaking to and for a country requires much more than mere flag waving.

In Blair’s time, Labour was a deliberately top-down, tightly controlled operation, something the party is always fond of. But Labour’s 21st-century estrangement from the social grassroots demands something very different. One of its most mysterious shortcomings is the lack of any strong attempt to remind people that the party [runs most of England’s big cities](#): after May’s elections, eight out of England’s 10 “metro mayors” are Labour people. Placing them in the party’s frontline would start to bridge the gap between

the party in Westminster and everyday life, reduce the party's sect-like appearance and crowd out the [ghosts of yesteryear](#) – Peter Mandelson, some older Corbynites – still rattling out ancient factional disputes.

In her own way, Labour's charismatic, locally rooted candidate in Batley and Spen proved the point: imagine someone like that given strong lines instead of banal bullet-points, and you might have a sense of how Starmer and his party could finally start to raise their game.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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Fire, waves and warfare: the way we make sense of Covid

Elena Semino

Metaphors have helped us understand the pandemic. But they can also create confusion and complacency



‘As much as metaphors can be used to enlighten and reassure, they can also misfire and cause confusion, distraction and obfuscation.’ Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

‘As much as metaphors can be used to enlighten and reassure, they can also misfire and cause confusion, distraction and obfuscation.’ Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Mon 5 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

An enemy, a mugger, a tsunami, a fire, a race, and even glitter that gets everywhere: just a few of the metaphors used to describe different aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic since it began in early 2020.

Whether consciously or not, people often use metaphor to talk and think about complex, abstract and sensitive subjects. Time, illness and the climate crisis are prime examples of concepts that may be explained through clearcut, accessible imagery. Allusions to journeys, fights and sport help us make sense of things that would otherwise be inexpressible or unknowable. In my research, I have shown how metaphors are central to our understanding of the experience of [cancer](#), [chronic pain](#) and [mental illness](#).

So when a new invisible virus arrived that was responsible for illness, death and unprecedented disruption, it made sense that metaphor was used to turn something incomprehensible into more familiar, accessible and predictable terms. Throughout the pandemic metaphors have performed a dual role, both explaining the situation and steering behavioural change.

Research shows the metaphors we are exposed to [affect how we think](#) and feel about problems and their solutions. On 17 March 2020, Boris Johnson described coronavirus as “an enemy” that “can be deadly” but was “also beatable”, and hinted at the resources and sacrifices that would be needed to “win the fight”. For all the criticisms that have been rightly levelled against them, war metaphors have long been [known](#) to be effective at persuading people that a problem is serious and urgent enough to require collective effort and a change in behaviour: if we are at war with a dangerous enemy, we need to pull together and be prepared to play our part in defeating it.

[Fire](#) metaphors have proven to be one of the most powerful ways of conveying the importance of social distancing and the need for continued effort and vigilance. In October 2020, the Welsh government imposed a two-week “firebreak” lockdown (in contrast with the “circuit-breaker” lockdown that failed to materialise in England). In February this year, the director general of the World Health Organization tweeted about a global decline in Covid-19 cases but [cautioned](#): “The fire is not out, but we have reduced its size. If we stop fighting it on any front, it will come roaring back.” Fires evoke vivid images, strong emotions and powerful narratives, and are particularly appropriate for any phenomenon we perceive as “spreading”.

When vaccines finally came along, Johnson described them as providing a “wall” of immunity, which can function as defence both against metaphorical enemies and against metaphorical waves. One columnist

[explained](#) the speed of vaccine development had resulted from the fact that processes which usually happen sequentially had taken place “as if a restaurant brought out your starter, mains, and pudding simultaneously. The cooking time for each is no shorter, but the meal isn’t half speeded up.” And on [Twitter](#), Dr Tom Frieden used Snapchat messages as a metaphor to address the fear that mRNA vaccines can change people’s DNA.

Yet the pandemic has also revealed the dark side of metaphors: they can misfire and cause confusion, distraction and obfuscation. War metaphors may have been appropriate at the start of the pandemic, but [research](#) has shown that by foregrounding the need for action rather than inaction, they can discourage self-limiting behaviours. This is a major flaw when previously unimaginable self-restraint has been demanded from so many for so long. War metaphors can also be used to [legitimise](#) excessive clampdowns on the part of governments, and to justify expectations of heroic sacrifice on the part of professional groups such as teachers.

They can also create expectations about a clearcut moment of victory which, when frustrated, can lead to fatalism. It is not a surprise that, after some references to the “bugle of the scientific cavalry” in anticipation of the vaccine rollout, Johnson has shed the military rhetoric (as well as the light-heartedness of “squash the sombrero” and doing “whack-a-mole” on local outbreaks) in favour of sombre warnings of learning to live with the virus. Even “freedom day”, which could suggest the defeat of an enemy keeping us captive, has now mostly been replaced by the much less triumphant “terminus point” for the lifting of restrictions.

As early as July 2020, the [WHO](#) was critical of the ubiquitous metaphor of multiple “waves” of the pandemic because it underplayed the role of human behaviour in controlling the spread of the virus. As the WHO’s Margaret Harris put it: “We are in the first wave. It’s going to be one big wave.” That did not, however, stop Johnson from saying in [March 2021](#): “On the continent right now you can see, sadly, there is a third wave under way. And people in this country should be under no illusions that previous experience has taught us that when a wave hits our friends, I’m afraid it washes up on our shores as well.” In doing so, he exploited the uncontrollability of literal waves to blame what was happening in other countries for a resurgence of the pandemic in the UK.

[Why we shouldn't be calling our healthcare workers 'heroes' | Charlotte Higgins](#)

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Even the appeal and accessibility of metaphorical “tiers” and traffic light systems can be undermined by a lack of clarity and consistency in how they are applied. Last autumn, the original tiers 1, 2 and 3 of local restrictions were quickly translated into green, amber and red. However, as tier 1 was officially described as “medium alert”, there was in fact no level of restrictions that properly corresponded to a green traffic light. More recently, the relative clarity of “green”, “amber” and “red” lists for international travel has been undermined by a lack of explicit criteria for changing the status of individual countries from one category to another. Confusion surrounds the introduction of a “green watchlist” of countries that may be imminently downgraded to amber.

Metaphors are inescapable. Used sensitively and appropriately, they can help individuals and societies overcome overwhelming, long-term problems such as a global pandemic. But used insensitively or inappropriately, or when undermined by inconsistent actions and policies, metaphors can add to confusion and disillusionment, making problems harder to overcome. In short, to employ another metaphor, they can be a double-edged sword.

- Elena Semino is professor of linguistics and verbal art at Lancaster University, and director of the ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science. She is author of Metaphor in Discourse and lead author of Metaphor, Cancer and the End of Life

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Cryptocurrencies' dream of escaping the global financial system is crumbling

Quinn Slobodian

As digital currencies break through to the mainstream, it's becoming clear that their future is far from stateless



‘Chained to the Earth by cables and wire, crypto is more likely to live on as an extension of the nation-state than as a means of escaping it.’ Bitcoin Embassy bar in Mexico City Photograph: Toya Sarno Jordan/Reuters

‘Chained to the Earth by cables and wire, crypto is more likely to live on as an extension of the nation-state than as a means of escaping it.’ Bitcoin Embassy bar in Mexico City Photograph: Toya Sarno Jordan/Reuters

Mon 5 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

Since a mysterious figure named [Satoshi Nakamoto](#) first created bitcoin after the 2008 financial crash, cryptocurrencies have multiplied. There are now thousands of coins in circulation, with names that sound like jettisoned intergalactic missions: Libra, [Ethereum](#), Stellar, Auroracoin. Though they

differ in branding, almost all cryptocurrencies share a common fantasy: to remove the money supply from the hands of politicians and sidestep the financial institutions that govern the movement of cash across the Earth. But it's recently become obvious that cryptocurrencies can escape neither of these things.

Indeed, the libertarian dream shared by their early proponents appears to be dying at the very moment cryptocurrencies have broken through to the mainstream. “Stablecoins” are pegged to the value of national currencies, while the US Federal Reserve is [developing its own digital currency](#). Elsewhere the Bank for International Settlements recently [lent its support to central bank digital currencies](#) for the first time. These developments turn the original purpose of stateless money on its head. Even El Salvador’s recognition of bitcoin as legal tender is being [criticised](#) by true believers for forcing consumers to accept the cryptocurrency, thus undermining the very principle of choice.

Despite crypto’s futuristic branding, its intellectual origin story is more mundane. The idea of a stateless money supply first arose in debates over a common European currency. While the 1992 Maastricht treaty paved the way for the introduction of the euro in 1999, this wasn’t the only currency model on the table at the time. A lesser-known idea, proposed by the German economist Herbert Giersch in 1975, imagined a parallel currency called the europa that would circulate alongside and compete with national currencies rather than replacing them. Along with fellow economist members of the neoliberal Mont Pelerin Society, Giersch thought what he called “currency competition” in the title of a 1978 book would gradually draw people away from their lira, francs and drachmas.

Giersch’s student Roland Vaubel, who would help found the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party nearly four decades later, was drafted by the European Commission to explore the idea. Meanwhile, in 1976, Friedrich Hayek, who was in regular contact with Giersch and Vaubel, published two pamphlets with the rightwing Institute of Economic Affairs. Hayek’s essays – one on “choice in currency”, the other on “[the denationalisation of money](#)” – became touchstones for those who wanted to bring stateless money into existence.

But once it was clear that the euro had beaten out the europa, libertarians began to look elsewhere for places to experiment. By the second half of the 1990s, the internet seemed to offer a space that lay beyond national sovereignty and earthly territory. In 1996, the internet activist John Perry Barlow proclaimed that “legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context” do not apply online. Some libertarians went further than Barlow and pragmatically observed that the old laws of property might be more secure than ever in cyberspace, where users could escape the reach of national governments and taxes. In 1998, the runner-up for the Mont Pelerin Society’s Hayek prize forecast that the internet would “undermine the monopoly supply of money by governments and allow people to choose between different private money suppliers”.

This vision of money without states was captured in a 1997 libertarian manifesto written by the investment adviser James Dale Davidson and former Times editor William Rees-Mogg (father of the Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg). Disguised as an airport paperback, The Sovereign Individual: How to survive and thrive during the collapse of the welfare state predicted that the internet would “denationalise” money. People could forgo reliance on the legal tender approved by governments and instead use immaterial “cybercash”, which the authors imagined as “encrypted sequences of multihundred-digit prime numbers”. Cybercash, they argued, “will bring Hayek’s logic vividly to life”.

Their book proved popular with a little-known venture capitalist in San Francisco’s Bay Area. The young Peter Thiel was enthused by Davidson and Rees-Mogg’s vision for a nationless digital currency, and in 1999 he launched PayPal, bringing their prophecy closer to reality. Thiel’s company was just the beginning of what would later become a proliferation of different digital currencies. But in recent months, a less starry-eyed future for crypto has come into focus. The first flaw in the bitcoin model used by the majority of cryptocurrencies is, ironically, a consequence of its own success. Solving the equations to acquire new bitcoins (referred to as “mining”) requires large volumes of computer hardware that frequently overheats and is extremely energy intensive. Estimates put the annual energy usage of bitcoin mining between that of Sweden and Malaysia.

And as these “mines” multiply, their operations begin to stretch and even overwhelm national power grids. Iran banned bitcoin mining last month after it led to blackouts and possibly the shutdown of a nuclear reactor. Multiple provinces in China, one of the world’s biggest producers of bitcoin, banned mining too, leading to reports of miners relocating their hardware to sites of more traditional underground extraction in Canada, South Dakota and Texas.

Chinese crackdowns are extending to holdings in crypto too, sending the value of bitcoin tumbling. South Korea recently seized tens of millions of dollars of crypto assets from its wealthy citizens in a clampdown on tax avoidance – precisely what the techno-libertarians hoped “digital cash” would make impossible. And earlier this month, the US Justice Department announced it had managed to track down and recover most of the ransom paid in bitcoin to hackers of the Colonial Pipeline. The traceless currency leaves a trail after all.

Chained to the Earth by cables and wire, crypto is more likely to live on as an extension of the nation state than as a means of escaping it. Like goldbugs before them, crypto fans may have to acclimatise to their hobby horse being, at best, a volatile new asset class for high-risk hedging rather than a truly alternative global currency (though even on this, opinions differ). Most travellers to the crypto craze since its initial spike in late 2017 seem to be drawn not by the possibility of bringing Hayek’s vision to life, but by a willingness to take risks for speculative payoffs. Indeed, the future for crypto now looks less like a techno-utopian dream or libertarian fantasy, and more like subordination to the very thing it was designed to overthrow: the nation state’s monopoly over the money supply.

- Quinn Slobodian is an associate professor of history at Wellesley College

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I thought HIV meant death but it led me to fight to save millions of lives

Vuyiseka Dubula

Twenty years ago in South Africa people were dying unable to access expensive antiretrovirals. The creation of the Global Fund was gamechanging



A march at the 2016 world Aids conference in Durban. Treatment Action Campaign's work in South Africa led to the foundation of the Global Fund which helped provide equal access to antiretroviral therapy and saved 38 million lives. Photograph: AP

A march at the 2016 world Aids conference in Durban. Treatment Action Campaign's work in South Africa led to the foundation of the Global Fund which helped provide equal access to antiretroviral therapy and saved 38 million lives. Photograph: AP

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Mon 5 Jul 2021 04.33 EDT

In 2001, at the age of 22 – when I thought my life had just begun – I was diagnosed with HIV. At that time, the diagnosis felt like a death sentence. Every day, I waited for my hour to die.

However, after two months of waiting, death didn't come.

Instead, a comrade arrived and took me to the offices of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) – a South African group fighting for access to HIV treatment for all. There, I met other people living with HIV for the first time. And there, I learned my first lesson about epidemics: for people living in poverty to access the services they need to defeat diseases, it will always involve a fight.

I learned my first lesson about epidemics: people living in poverty always have to fight to access services they need

This year, we mark 40 years since the first cases of HIV were reported. We have made [extraordinary progress](#) in that time. Twenty years ago, when I

first learned of my HIV status, science had already gifted humanity with drugs to treat the virus. However, South Africans like myself, and many other people living in poverty, [continued to die](#) in their millions. The highly effective antiretroviral therapy cost nearly \$10,000, well beyond our reach.

To make this therapy accessible to people living in poverty, we needed to fight. TAC introduced me to the fight for social justice. For most of us at TAC, it was the fight for our lives, because friends and family members were dying from the disease. At the time, the leadership of South [Africa](#) was rejecting the science of antiretroviral treatment and letting people die.

TAC and other advocates around the world poured into the streets. We recited our wishes and the wishes of millions of others who were dying. We called out governments for neglect and pharmaceutical companies for putting profits before people. We demanded measures that would ensure access to treatment for all. We demanded equity.

[Eradicating polio is finally within reach. Why is the UK taking its foot off the pedal? | Anne Wafula Strike](#)

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We called for a people's fund that would strive to see that everyone, regardless of class, creed or colour, could access the treatment they needed to stay alive. The idea of a global mechanism to support people living in poverty to access treatment seemed unthinkable. Some people even doubted whether people living in poverty in Africa had sufficient literacy to adhere to treatment. But we marched on. That push led to political action and the creation of the [Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#) – a people's fund with a governance structure that would involve [civil society, communities and people affected by diseases](#).

Its impact was immediate. In South Africa, as in many other countries around the world, Global Fund investments catalysed efforts to treat all people by supporting early initiatives for treatment and building the necessary infrastructure. In 2004, I was one of many people who began to access lifesaving treatment.

The impact of the Global Fund partnership, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, has been gamechanging. [Twenty years later and with 38 million lives saved](#), the partnership continues to deliver on its mandate.

Vuyiseka Dubula is an HIV/Aids activist and director of the Africa centre for HIV/Aids management at Stellenbosch University in South Africa

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Hundreds of Afghan security forces flee as districts fall to Taliban

Militants' advance continues as Britain nears end of its two-decade deployment to country



Afghan soldiers on a road at the frontline of fighting with the Taliban near the city of Badakhshan in northern Afghanistan on Sunday. Photograph: Nazim Qasmy/AP

Afghan soldiers on a road at the frontline of fighting with the Taliban near the city of Badakhshan in northern Afghanistan on Sunday. Photograph: Nazim Qasmy/AP

[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) in Kabul and [Dan Sabbagh](#)

Sun 4 Jul 2021 13.01 EDT

The Taliban's rapid advance through northern [Afghanistan](#) continued on Sunday with more than a dozen districts falling to the militants, as Britain entered the final days of its two-decade deployment to [Afghanistan](#).

More than 300 members of the Afghan security forces fled across the border into Tajikistan to escape the militants, and Badakhshan and Takhar provinces are now largely under [Taliban](#) control, beyond the respective regional capitals.

There have been no public announcements about when the last British troops will fly out. Senior sources had recently said the US and British missions would end on 4 July, but after Joe Biden backed away from that date at a weekend press conference, London appeared to follow suit.

[Map](#)

On Friday the US handed over Bagram airbase, the heart of its campaign in Afghanistan, meaning it can no longer carry out significant operations in the country. The few hundred soldiers left are in effect on guard duty for the embassy.

But at a press conference soon afterwards, Biden brushed off questions about the end of the US deployment, saying it was a holiday weekend and “I want to talk about happy things, man”. Since then his press secretary, Jen Psaki, has reset expectations, saying the last troops would probably be out by the end of August.

On Sunday Britain’s Ministry of Defence said a few British troops remained in Afghanistan, blaming a fast-changing situation and “mixed messaging” for earlier reports of a 4 July departure.

Britain’s plans are expected to become clearer when Boris Johnson makes a statement to parliament early this week, most likely on Tuesday, after a meeting of the national security council (NSC) that will determine the shape of the UK’s future diplomatic and any residual military presence in Afghanistan. But one defence source cautioned that the NSC meeting had been postponed before and it could happen again.

Most of Britain's 750-strong contribution to what is officially a "train and assist" stabilisation mission in Afghanistan has already left. The NSC meeting is expected to discuss whether any SAS or other special forces will remain in the country – although that decision will not be made public – and whether some troops might be required to guard the British embassy in Kabul, currently protected by contractors. Defence sources said the current arrangement was likely to be continued.

In common with other Nato countries that have ended their missions in recent weeks, the UK appears to be planning a very low-key military departure. Few politicians want to highlight that a military project launched to destroy the Taliban is ending with the group resurgent across the country.

In Kabul, Biden's holiday weekend remarks prompted outrage, as observers tracked the rapid spread of Taliban control, including in areas such as Badakhshan that 20 years ago had been strongholds of resistance against the militant group.

"As an Afghan woman, I don't have that option 'to talk about happy things'. I have to worry about a looming gender apartheid," Shaharzad Akbar, the head of the Afghanistan International Human Rights Commission, said on Twitter.



Afghan government soldiers sit at a bridge near the Tajikistan border after fleeing from Taliban advances. Photograph: AP

The Taliban now control about a third of Afghanistan's nearly 400 districts and threaten many more. Although they have not yet taken any provincial capitals, they now surround several of them, from Ghazni City in the east to Maimana in northern Faryab province.

In many areas, security forces have surrendered without a fight, sometimes under deals brokered by local elders. Videos showing Taliban embracing surrendering soldiers and providing them with money to travel home may have given government forces confidence that they could abandon their posts without losing their lives.

In Badakhshan, Mohib-ul Rahman, a provincial council member, blamed Taliban successes on the poor morale of troops who are mostly outnumbered and have been left without vital supplies or the possibility of reinforcement.

"Unfortunately, the majority of the districts were left to Taliban without any fight," Rahman told the Associated Press.

The rapid advance left Badakhshan's capital at risk, and on Saturday television images showed politicians and government officials crowding on to planes for an evacuation to Kabul.

On Sunday special forces arrived by helicopter to secure the city and potentially try to reclaim some districts. But Afghan security forces have managed to push the Taliban out of only a handful of the places they have seized over the last few months.

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After the retreat: what now for Afghanistan?

As the west departs, the Taliban are resurgent. They say they have changed – but misogyny and brutality still mark their rule



American troops landing in Khost province, Afghanistan, in 2008. US forces withdrew from Bagram on Friday. Photograph: David Furst/AFP/Getty Images

American troops landing in Khost province, Afghanistan, in 2008. US forces withdrew from Bagram on Friday. Photograph: David Furst/AFP/Getty Images

[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) and [Akhtar Mohammad Makoii](#) in Herat

Sun 4 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

The public flogging in Obe district, captured on video that quickly went viral this spring, was a mistake, a local [Taliban](#) judge admitted. Commanders were angry.

As the footage spread between urban Afghans, who shared it on their smartphones, it revived memories of darker times when the militants ruled the country, and an outpouring of revulsion.

Men with lashes take turns to bear down on a woman visibly bracing, even under her burqa, against the blows, and by the end screaming out in pain: “O God, I repent.” An audience of men and boys watch, or snap photos and videos.

The problem, the cleric explained, was not the punishment but the video, which circulated in April as the militants were consolidating control of the area. “She committed adultery, and I would have ordered the same thing,” he told the *Observer* in a telephone interview. “But the commanders said that we shouldn’t have done it in public.”

[map of Afghanistan](#)

Years into taking up the post in the Taliban’s shadow administration it is a sentence he still hands down regularly for “adultery”, which in [Afghanistan](#) can cover any sexual relationship outside marriage, and can sometimes even include rape. Men are flogged and then jailed, he added. “I recently ordered the flogging of a woman inside her home. Relatives and neighbours came to us and said there were witnesses to this man and woman being together. We lashed her 20 times.”

Obe sits just to the east of the silk-road city of Herat, a valley of grape and peach orchards nestled between two mountains, famous for the curative waters of a natural hot spring. In more peaceful times people used to head to the city at weekends for picnics, to escape the heat and dust of the city.

But for years the Taliban have been fighting in Obe’s fields and villages, and last month it became one of dozens of districts across Afghanistan to fall fully under the militants’ control, as foreign forces [accelerated a departure](#) they are expected to complete this month. The experiences of people there

offer a glimpse of what a country, or large swaths of one, ruled by the Taliban might look like, and it is a disturbing vision.

And the details of how Obe finally fell offer a worrying insight into the militants' growing confidence, resources and ambition, and also the problems hobbling Afghan security forces – from lack of air support to questionable strategic decisions – as they start a new era of going into battle without foreign backup.

On Friday, [US troops left Bagram](#), the sprawling airbase north of Kabul that was the symbolic and operational heart of the American operation in Afghanistan. Fewer than 1,000 US troops are thought to be still in the country, mostly for security purposes in and around Kabul.

Britain [is expected to bring the last of its regular troops home](#) from Afghanistan over the weekend to match the US departure, and in a few days Boris Johnson is expected to make a statement to parliament marking the change and outlining the UK's future diplomatic presence in, and military posture towards, Afghanistan.



Afghan women fear the return of the Taliban. Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

America and its allies arrived in the country in 2001, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, to topple the Taliban and find terrorist mastermind Osama bin

Laden.

The al-Qaida leader is long dead, but few politicians are willing to dwell on the reality that the international forces are leaving with the Taliban – who seemed utterly routed 20 years ago – [resurgent on the ground](#).

Through withdrawal talks with the Americans, the militants have also gained a form of international recognition they had long craved. The group's senior envoys have responded by burnishing the image they present to the wider world.

At peace talks in the Qatari capital Doha, and across other platforms including a *New York Times* opinion column [by their deputy leader](#), the Taliban's representatives have been presenting an image of change. They use the language of peace and reconciliation, and have promised women their rights as “granted by Islam – from the right to education to the right to work”.

Yet in Obe they have revived most of the brutal and misogynist policies that marked their rule in the 1990s, according to multiple accounts collected by the *Observer*.

We spoke to civilians living in Obe, others who had recently fled, the Taliban judge, engineers working on district development projects, government soldiers who fought in the bitter last stand for the district's centre, an activist who is in regular contact with women there, and local and provincial officials. Almost all asked to remain anonymous, for fear of reprisals against them or their relatives.

“The international platform for the Taliban is truly disturbing. We live under the Taliban, we deal with them and we know they have not changed,” said Halima Salimi, a women's rights activist based in Herat who receives regular death threats for her work.

She is still in contact with fellow activists in Obe, who say they are now confined to their homes and barred from work.

On 14 June, the last government forces in the district were helicoptered out of a besieged outpost. The militants are confident enough of their control that last week they called a meeting at the mosque in the main street to lay out their laws and plans for Obe, which include a flat 10% tax on all earnings.

The district schools have been closed for years by fighting, or boycotted by parents worried their children will be caught in crossfire. But when they reopen, girls will not be allowed to study past sixth grade, interviewees said.

Women must wear the all-enveloping burqa and cannot work or leave their home for any reason without a male “guardian”, a role that can be filled even by prepubescent sons, nephews or brothers. Shopkeepers have been ordered not to serve women out alone, and Taliban beat any unaccompanied women they catch.

01:55

[Joe Biden: 'It's time for American troops to come home from Afghanistan' – video](#)

For women without a suitable relative, the militants have a complex system, said one mother of three who fled Obe after her home was destroyed in recent fighting.

“She must let the Taliban know there is no man in the house, and they will tell her she can only go to certain places – like here, here and here – making a kind of map restricting her movement.”

Mobile phones are regularly checked by Taliban fighters, another Obe resident said, and if they find music, dancing or anything supporting the government, the owner will be beaten. If they find pictures of him or her in government uniform, they are executed.

Physical punishment including amputations and floggings are handed down as sentences by judges, including the one who spoke to the *Observer*, who asked not to be named because he was not authorised to speak to journalists.

“Muslims agree with this. If you don’t give sharia punishment, crimes will rise. People come to us and say they are grateful,” said the judge. “When the government was in power, no robbery was investigated. Now after we came to power, people can leave their doors open.”

In his court, which meets regularly and hears three or four cases a day, often on land and water disputes, “testimony from two women equals that from one man”, he added.

The refugee mother conceded that the group had brought an end to lawlessness, but for her it was not enough to offset all the cruelty and restrictions.

“The Taliban have already made a really big reduction in robbery – I know many people support them and are satisfied because of this, but I don’t want them [ruling the area].

“They had special people responsible for beating women, they used rope or pieces of wood to hit them,” she said. Men are beaten for not praying, and not fasting during Ramadan, and there are other petty restrictions like a ban on makeup. “It was exactly like last time they were in power [before 2001]. I was in Obe then too.”



Afghan militia fighters with regular soldiers at a gathering in Kabul last month. Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

One man still living in the area said: “Of course you just worry about the children’s future.” There was a bleak sense of history repeating itself, he said. “I was only educated until fifth grade, then I had to drop out for the same reason.”

The Taliban, despite their public commitment to ending “the killing and maiming”, are accused of war crimes. In the cities they have been linked to targeted assassinations; in Obe, locals say they have used families as human shields.

During the battle for the district centre, women and children were ordered not to leave at least one house the Taliban were using as a base for operations for several days, residents say. They believe the family were made to serve as insurance against airstrikes by government forces or American drones.

The comprehensive capture of the district centre, after years of the Taliban attacking and falling back, appears to have been made possible by an influx of fighters from other provinces, under a new commander. Rafi Shindandi, probably a nom de guerre, arrived in the area after Eid, which ended the fasting month of Ramadan in May. He brought around 60 or 70 fighters, from places including nearby Farah and Badghis provinces.

When they arrived, local Taliban warned a group of government-funded engineers working in Obe on development projects, including bridges and water supply, to leave. The engineers had previously built up a relationship with the insurgents to ensure that their civilian work, such as water supply projects, could go ahead without attacks or accidental targeting in battles.

“Local Taliban and elders told us when they arrived and warned they were dangerous,” he said. “We trusted the local fighters, but in war you can’t tell good and bad apart easily, and we didn’t have a relationship with the new ones.”

Sightings of reinforcement fighters were reported in other districts that fell to Taliban control, and may have been part of a tactic of preemptive strikes against areas that had been strongholds of resistance 20 years earlier.

“That the Taliban would launch widespread attacks while, or immediately after, US forces left was to be expected, but the scale and speed of the Afghan National Security Forces’ collapse was not,” said Kate Clark of the Afghanistan Analysts Network in a recent analysis of the Taliban’s takeover in much of the country’s north.

The insurgents held around a quarter of the country’s nearly 400 district centres at the end of June, the thinktank calculated from news reports and its own investigations. Clark went on to describe “the plunging morale of members of the ANSF in the field and … a new-found confidence among Taliban fighters that military victory was coming their way”.

In some provinces, almost all the areas beyond city limits have fallen; government supporters fear the Taliban is positioning for a push on provincial capitals. Although it has overrun several such capitals briefly in the past, it has not yet been able to take and hold them. That track record is likely to be put to the test soon.

Other factors undermining government forces are corruption, desertion and ill-thought-out policy. The air support vital to holding the Taliban at bay has dwindled, with the Afghan air force badly overstretched and the US now operating from thousands of miles away.



An Afghan soldier stands guard at Bagram airbase on Friday, the day of the US's departure. Photograph: Mohammad Ismail/Reuters

In December last year, the government disbanded a supportive unit of the militia-like Afghan Local Police in Obe, under what looks increasingly like an ill-conceived demobilisation programme. Several other districts that fell to Taliban control had recently lost ALP forces as well, Clark wrote.

In Obe, the Taliban attack on the district centre had hardened into a siege by June. A few dozen men from the intelligence, police and army were stranded on a military base with just a glass of water a day, and dwindling food. They called desperately for air support or evacuation, but the only visitors who arrived were Red Crescent officials who had come to collect bodies.

The men had been reduced to stripping leaves off the trees to eat before a group of parents launched a three-day protest in Herat, demanding support for the besieged group. Initially polite, by day three the terrified and furious parents were burning tyres in the street and threatening suicide attacks. The next day, helicopters were dispatched, but for many it was already too late. “Bodies were carried out of injured men who would have survived if they got help sooner,” said one of the commandos bitterly.

At least one of the men trapped inside, who himself comes from Obe, has been quietly sounding out friends in the area and in Herat about organising a militia to try to reclaim the district.

For years, western-backed efforts aimed to disarm the country's irregular militias. But the Taliban's advances and the accelerated departure of foreign troops have convinced Afghans whose homes are threatened, and the officials who have to protect them, that they need more people to pick up guns and fight. [Militias are forming around the country](#), many encouraged, financed or even called up by the government itself.

The fighter from Obe has lost brothers, his father and at least 20 more distant relatives to the Taliban, and refuses to consider surrender or collaboration. "The situation is catastrophic, and the government won't even listen to me," he said. "So now my work is just to be killed, or liberate my town."

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Afghanistan: America's 'longest war' ends amid accusations of betrayal

Analysis: Washington did not learn the lessons of Vietnam and more death and suffering are inevitable



An Afghan national army soldier stands guard at Bagram on the day the last of the American troops vacated the airbase. Photograph: Mohammad Ismail/Reuters

An Afghan national army soldier stands guard at Bagram on the day the last of the American troops vacated the airbase. Photograph: Mohammad Ismail/Reuters

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Sun 4 Jul 2021 07.00 EDT

The US war in Afghanistan was not supposed to be another Vietnam. “I don’t do quagmires,” said [Donald Rumsfeld](#), the architect of the original US invasion, who died last week. In the end the former US defence secretary did two quagmires, airily assuming Afghanistan was “won” in the spring of 2003 when he sent American troops to fight in Iraq.

US combat troops were in Vietnam for eight years, but they have been in [Afghanistan](#) for 20. It has been America’s longest war by far.

Joe Biden has insisted the withdrawal is not quite complete, but the remaining few hundred US troops in Afghanistan are there on guard duty. The abandonment of Bagram airbase on Friday marked the true end to the US military presence in the country.

Built by the Soviet Union in the 1950s, Bagram was the hub of US operations for two decades as well as a notorious prison camp. American aircraft will continue to fly over Afghanistan but they will be launched from “over the horizon”, from warships and bases in other countries.

As in Vietnam, the US is leaving after a peace deal with an enemy it tried to destroy and failed. As in Vietnam, the emboldened enemy is not expected to keep the peace. Saigon held out for two years against the North Vietnamese army after the American withdrawal. Some US intelligence estimates do not even give Kabul six months.

The embassy in the Afghan capital has its own “emergency action plan” for worst-case scenarios, disclosed by [Politico](#) on Friday, which inevitably brings back memories of the humiliating scramble from the roof of the Saigon mission in April 1975. Then as now, those who worked with the Americans, such as military interpreters, have been pleading to be evacuated alongside them.

According to the United Nations, at least 50 of Afghanistan’s nearly 400 districts have fallen to the Taliban since May. With the US gone, Afghan civilians are trying to organise [self-defence militias](#) to defend their villages against the forces waiting in the countryside around them.

The military lesson of Vietnam was that the US could not conduct a counter-insurgency thousands of miles from home against an ideologically driven enemy rooted in a community that ultimately saw American troops as occupiers. It was a lesson learned – and then forgotten in the fervour that followed the 9/11 attacks.

Rumsfeld thought he could dodge Vietnam's shadow by using small numbers of US special forces in partnership with local warlords, but that is after all how US involvement in Vietnam began in 1964, with small "A-Team" groups of advisers training regular and paramilitary groups in the south.

By the end in Afghanistan, young Americans were being deployed who were not even born when the war started, in some cases serving alongside their parents who have served multiple tours of duty there.

Both wars worked like a mangle, pulling in more and more troops, money and equipment to justify and protect what had already been spent or lost. Once Americans and Afghans had died to drive out the Taliban, open schools to girls and bolster the army, withdrawal seemed like a betrayal.

That mindset kept the "forever war" going, but that does not mean it was not real. Those picking up guns to defend their villages and many Afghan women and civil society activists now feel betrayed by the departing Americans.

Whatever happens, more death and suffering are inevitable. Joe Biden and the US will not be able to escape some degree of responsibility, even if they are no longer there.

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‘A day for respect’: military veterans mark US troops’ exit from Afghanistan

Veterans groups say that after 20 years the withdrawal from America’s ‘forgotten war’ provokes complicated feelings



A squadron of US helicopters in Bagram. A total of 2,312 US military personnel in Afghanistan have died and 20,066 have been wounded since the war began in 2001. Photograph: Roslan Rahman/AFP/Getty Images

A squadron of US helicopters in Bagram. A total of 2,312 US military personnel in Afghanistan have died and 20,066 have been wounded since the war began in 2001. Photograph: Roslan Rahman/AFP/Getty Images

[Edward Helmore](#)

Sun 4 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

As the last US combat troops prepare to leave [Afghanistan](#) after an almost 20-year deployment, veterans organizations in America are approaching the turning point as a moment of remembrance and caution.

Robert Couture, spokesperson for the [Veterans of Foreign Wars](#) (VFW) in Washington, DC, told the Guardian the issue of withdrawal was complicated for many veterans.

[US troops leave Afghanistan's Bagram airbase after nearly 20 years](#)

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“As someone who has served twice in Afghanistan, I can say that service members went because our nation asked for us to go, to do the mission we were asked to do, and we come home when we’re asked to come home,” he said.

The VFW, Couture added, “would be there to support veterans when they returned home. We are here to ensure that they get the benefits that are due to them, for the ill and injured, over almost 20 years of being in Afghanistan.”

The ending of the war is not generating a drumbeat of daily headlines, even though the conflict has cost thousands of American and Afghan lives and seen tens of thousands of American men and women cycle through the combat zone and emerge as veterans. It is a conflict that has gone on for so long that some early veterans [found their own children](#) deployed in the same war.

Jo-Ann Maitland, the president of American Gold Star Mothers, told the Guardian that the final withdrawal of troops was “a day for respect, a day to respect and thank those for the service they have done”.

Maitland, whose son, a specialist in the army, died in an accident on active duty, said the organization which represent mothers who have lost serving children, said the organization would not be drawn into political questions.

“It’s a day to respect any service member who did not come home from any conflict, killed in action, from suicide, or any cause of death, and to

remember that behind every service member there is a family waiting for them to come home.”

But for many service members deployed in Afghanistan, the initial purpose of the US mission – to go after al-Qaida and ultimately to kill Osama bin Laden – had long since been met and the mission had devolved into America’s “forever war”.

A total of 2,312 US military personnel in Afghanistan have died and 20,066 have been wounded since 2001. The number of civilian deaths in Afghanistan range from 35,000 to 40,000, while the cost of military operations is put at \$824bn.

Joe Biden, asked about the risks of US withdrawal, said last week: “Look, we were in Afghanistan for 20 years, 20 years,” adding that he believed the Afghan government under President Ashraf Ghani “have capacity” to sustain a government and prevent Kabul from being overrun by the Taliban.

Biden’s comments came as a group of more than 50 veterans, including retired generals David Petraeus and Stanley McChrystal, called on Biden to evacuate thousands of Afghan interpreters and other allies from the region in the face of revenge attacks from the Taliban.

More than 18,000 Afghans have applied for a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) to seek safety in the US, according to the state department, but the processing of their visas often can take years.

“The imminent withdrawal of US and Nato troops from Afghanistan makes this moral and national security imperative more critical than it has ever been,” the letter said.

“We humbly ask that you take extraordinary action to evacuate properly vetted Afghans to a safe location outside of Afghanistan for visa processing, appoint a senior Interagency lead, and allocate significant resources for mission planning and execution.”

At a rally advocating for the evacuation of interpreters staged outside the White House on Thursday, Kim Staffieri, the co-founder and executive

director of the Association of Wartime Allies, said “there is no more time” for the issue to be considered.

“Once the US is gone in one month, you’ll never hear from me again,” one man told her. “Because I’ll be gone.”

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Second man charged after Chris Whitty accosted in London park

Man charged with assault and obstructing police after incident involving chief medical officer



Prof Chris Whitty was accosted by a group of men in St James's Park, central London, on 27 June. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

Prof Chris Whitty was accosted by a group of men in St James's Park, central London, on 27 June. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

PA Media

Tue 6 Jul 2021 02.43 EDT

A second man has been charged with common assault and obstructing police after England's chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, was accosted in a central London park, the Metropolitan police said.

Jonathan Chew, 24, of no fixed address, was charged on Monday and will appear at Westminster magistrates court on Tuesday.

An investigation was launched after Whitty was accosted by a group of men in St James's Park at about 7.20pm on Sunday 27 June.

Officers spoke to Whitty, who did not suffer any injuries, and checked his welfare.

Footage of the incident, lasting around 20 seconds, was shared on social media.

The Met police said officers had reviewed the footage and the matter was referred to the public order crime team.

Lewis Hughes, 23, of Romford, east London, was charged with common assault on 1 July and is due to appear at Westminster magistrates court on 30 July.

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Chris Whitty: keeping Covid restrictions will only delay wave

England's chief medical officer says hospitalisations will not be reduced by keeping rules this summer

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01:19

Chris Whitty says keeping Covid restrictions will only delay next wave – video

[Ian Sample](#) and [Natalie Grover](#)

Mon 5 Jul 2021 14.58 EDT

Maintaining the current Covid restrictions through the summer would only delay a wave of hospitalisations and deaths rather than reduce them, the chief medical officer for England has warned.

Prof Chris Whitty told a Downing Street briefing that while scientific opinion was mixed on when to lift the last [remaining restrictions in the government's roadmap](#) out of lockdown, he believed that doing so in the summer had some advantages over releasing in the autumn.

“At a certain point, you move to the situation where instead of actually averting hospitalisations and deaths, you move over to just delaying them. So you’re not actually changing the number of people who will go to hospital or die, you may change when they happen,” he said.

“There is quite a strong view by many people, including myself actually, that going in the summer has some advantages, all other things being equal, to opening up into the autumn when schools are going back and when we’re heading into the winter period when the NHS tends to be under greatest pressure for many other reasons,” he added.

But he also admitted decisions were being made in a situation of uncertainty.

Whitty’s comments build on [modelling from Imperial College London](#) that revealed an apparent “sweet spot” in when to take step 4 in the government’s roadmap.

The team, led by Prof Neil Ferguson, found that delaying step four until late July could prevent thousands of deaths. But under some scenarios, deaths were actually higher if restrictions remained in place until all adults had received two shots – estimated to be in early December.

The longer delay can lead to more deaths, the scientists believe, because people emerge from lockdown at a time of year when respiratory viruses, including coronavirus, spread more easily, and people mix more indoors.

But the modelling did not take account of the proposed Covid booster programme which would offer further single shots to all over-50s from September.

Whitty conceded cases will continue to rise sharply in England if further restrictions are lifted as expected on 19 July. He referred to the “doubling times” for the number of infections – and how the hope is that the peak of this wave will come before the weather turns.

“So the question is, at what stage along this path are the doubling times getting to the point where the numbers are very high before we actually lead to a reduction because the peak of the epidemic happens?

“And what the modelling would imply is that we will reach that peak before we get to the point where we have the kind of pressures we saw in January, for example, of this year. But, inevitably, with all models you have to say there is some degree of uncertainty.”

Sage documents released on Monday warn that it is important to take steps to keep prevalence low.

“There is significant risk in allowing prevalence to rise, even if hospitalisations and deaths are kept low by vaccination,” the Sage document states. If a more pathogenic variant emerges when case numbers are high and have to be brought down “then restrictive measures would be required for much longer”, it adds.

The same document warns that lifting restrictions may create the conditions for “super-spreader events” and emphasises that beyond test, trace and isolation, the spread of disease can be reduced by more Covid-secure workplaces, better ventilation, Perspex screens, and urging people to stay at home when they are sick.

Calum Semple, professor of child health and outbreak medicine at the University of Liverpool, and a member of the Sage committee of experts, said there are many measures people can take to reduce the risk of spreading the virus once restrictions have been lifted.

“If we’ve come through 18 months of Covid and people are still not persuaded to change their behaviour, they are probably a group that are in denial for their own reasons and it may be very hard to modify their behaviour. It’ll be for the silent and sensible majority to take the lead,” he said.

“If you can work from home, I don’t know why employers shouldn’t encourage it, and I’d have no prob[lem] if a particular organisation said they’d like you to wear a face covering in their establishment. We should respect that and they should have the right to turn you away,” he added.

Catherine Noakes, professor of environmental engineering for buildings at the University of Leeds, also a member of Sage, said: “One of the main benefits from wearing a face-covering is that if you are infected it substantially reduces the amount of virus that is emitted into an environment, and therefore wearing a face-covering protects other people. I think this is a really important consideration for moving to a position of

‘personal responsibility’ – we need to consider the risks to others when making our own personal decisions around appropriate actions.”

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Covid death risk ‘almost four times higher’ for poorest in England

Inquiry reveals far worse prospects for working-age adults and says inequality has ‘frayed nation’s health’

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The inquiry warned there must be no reboot of the austerity policies of the past decade as the UK prepared to move out of the pandemic. Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

The inquiry warned there must be no reboot of the austerity policies of the past decade as the UK prepared to move out of the pandemic. Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

[Patrick Butler](#) Social policy editor

Tue 6 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

The chances of dying from Covid-19 were nearly four times higher for adults of working age in England's poorest areas than for those in the wealthiest places, [an inquiry](#) into the health impacts of the pandemic has found.

The nine-month inquiry by the [Health](#) Foundation charity said a decade of widening health inequalities and cuts to public services had "frayed the nation's health" and contributed to the UK's disproportionately high Covid death toll compared with similar countries.

It called for urgent action to reduce health differences and urged significant public investment in the NHS, jobs, housing, education, communities and social security. There must be no reboot of the austerity policies of the past decade as the UK prepared to move out of the pandemic, it warned.

"We may have to learn to live with Covid-19, but we don't have to live with its unequal impact," said Jo Bibby, the foundation's director of health, adding: "We cannot afford to make the same mistake twice."

The report echoes many of the findings of the public health expert Sir Michael Marmot's [report into Covid health inequalities](#) in Greater Manchester, published last week, and reflects increasing concerns over the scale and focus of the government's plans for the UK's long-term recovery from the pandemic.

The chair of the inquiry, Dame Clare Moriarty, said: "We need to aim for a recovery that builds economic and social resilience, with 'levelling up' not limited to geographical areas of disadvantage but that addresses the needs of groups who have experienced the most damaging impacts of the pandemic."

[Chart](#)

In her introduction to the report, Moriarty wrote: "The legacy of the pandemic is all around us in unmet health need, mental health problems, gaps in educational attainment, loss of employment and financial insecurity.

If we are to avoid these becoming long-term scars, it's time to confront our choices about how we value people."

There have been more than 150,000 excess deaths in the UK during the pandemic. The single biggest factor in the spread of Covid in the UK was the timing of lockdowns and the stringency of restrictions, the inquiry said. "Once the virus had spread the extent to which different groups were affected ... reflected variations in underlying health and socioeconomic factors that increased risk of exposure and worse outcomes."

High Covid death rates in the poorest areas were driven in part by poor pre-existing health problems, the inquiry found. People aged 50 to 69 in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods were more than twice as likely to have long-term conditions that put them at higher risk, such as diabetes and chronic lung conditions.

Jobs and occupations including caring, manufacturing and leisure also increased the risk exposure to the virus, as did poor housing conditions. Going into the pandemic, overcrowding in private and social rented housing in [England](#) was at its highest recorded level.

As well as being highest in deprived areas, Covid mortality rates were higher for certain groups, such as care home residents, disabled people and ethnic minority communities. Young people suffered disproportionately high levels of mental ill health.

This was a landmark opportunity to rebuild public services and reduce widening health inequalities and declining life expectancy across the UK, the inquiry said. "A recovery that puts increasing – and fair – opportunities for good health as a priority will need action to deal with the conditions that lead to poor health in the first place."

Adequate income, good-quality jobs and housing were necessary ingredients for good health, the inquiry said. "The decline in improvement in health life expectancy partly reflects the erosion of these social conditions in the UK in the decade preceding the pandemic – affecting certain groups to a greater extent."

The pandemic had “laid bare” the weaknesses of policy decisions made after the 2008 financial crash to drastically reduce public spending, the inquiry said. This meant when Covid struck, public services were in a weakened state and the health and financial resilience of many poorer households had been drastically weakened.

The widening of health inequalities in the UK over the past decade had “exposed the UK to a high death toll and reduced people’s ability to deal with the subsequent economic shock,” it said.

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North of England

North-east is now England's Covid hotspot, say experts

Local health leaders blame spike in cases on Delta variant affecting unvaccinated under-25s

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A pop-up vaccination centre in Newcastle. Inoculation rates have dropped off as infections soared. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

A pop-up vaccination centre in Newcastle. Inoculation rates have dropped off as infections soared. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Helen Pidd North of England editor and agencies

Mon 5 Jul 2021 13.41 EDT

The north-east of England is now the nation's Covid hotspot, with most cases among the largely unvaccinated under-25s, according to local health

leaders.

Despite the infection spike, there has been “no huge increase in hospitalisations” in [Newcastle](#), which has the highest rate of new coronavirus cases in England, said the city’s deputy director of public health, Lorna Smith.

There has been concern locally after vaccination rates dropped off as Covid infections soared. But Dr Jane Carman, the GP clinical lead for Newcastle’s vaccination programme, said she believed that the recent low take-up was due to the large numbers of people having to self-isolate, unable to leave the house.

She said the arrival of the Delta variant in Newcastle had coincided with the opening up of hospitality, creating a “perfect storm” for young, unvaccinated people.

Newcastle has a younger than average population and rates are highest in the city’s student suburbs, particularly Jesmond and Heaton, she added: “Most of the students haven’t been vaccinated. They are eligible now but they weren’t when the Delta variant arrived and now there are so many of them having to isolate who can’t leave the house and get vaccinated … A lot of people are self-isolating so we are surmising that is the reason people aren’t coming for the vaccine.”

Just 35.4% of 18- to 24-year-olds in Newcastle and neighbouring Gateshead had received [their first vaccine dose by](#) 27 June, compared with 47.9% in England as a whole.

There were 2,012 new cases of Covid-19 in Newcastle in the seven days to 30 June, the equivalent of 664.4 cases per 100,000 people.

This is up from 382.1 a week earlier, and is the highest rate for Newcastle for almost eight months, beating the peak of the second wave in January.

In other areas of north-east England, rates of new cases are at their highest since comparable figures began last summer, when mass testing was introduced across the UK.

These include South Tyneside (604.1), Gateshead (565.2), County Durham (551.2) and North Tyneside (547.3), according to analysis by the PA Media news agency.

Six of the top 10 highest rates in England are in north-east England – a major turnaround from just two weeks ago, when the entire top 10 were areas in north-west England.

Smith said: “Infection rates have increased quickly in most parts of the country, and clearly that is the case for our region.

“It still remains that the majority of cases are among the largely unvaccinated under-25s, who also account for much of the mixing that takes place in social and household settings.

“A much smaller proportion of cases are among the older and more vulnerable age groups and, thanks to the early impacts of the vaccination programme, this is not resulting in a huge increase in hospitalisations compared to previous waves of infections.”

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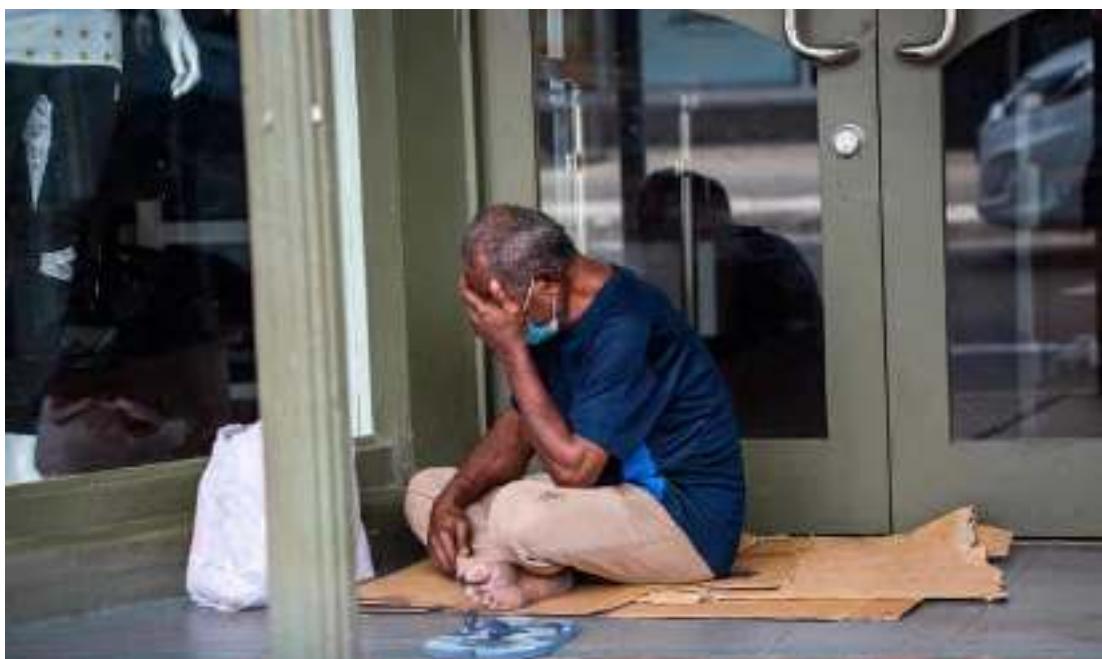
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[The Pacific projectFiji](#)

‘I’m always afraid’: Fiji reels as it moves from Covid haven to frontline

Largely spared an outbreak earlier in the pandemic, the Pacific nation is now grappling with a rising caseload, and a shrinking economy



A man sits on a road in Suva as a worsening outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus Delta variant has overwhelmed the South Pacific nation’s largest hospital. Photograph: Leon Lord/AFP/Getty Images

A man sits on a road in Suva as a worsening outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus Delta variant has overwhelmed the South Pacific nation’s largest hospital. Photograph: Leon Lord/AFP/Getty Images

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Geraldine Panapasa in Suva

Mon 5 Jul 2021 23.36 EDT

For most of the pandemic, when Fijians tuned in each night to updates from the country's health experts, they were greeted with the same message: the nation had reported zero, or one or two cases that day.

While most countries around the world grappled with surging Covid cases and overwhelmed health systems, Fiji – a country of about 900,000 people in the south Pacific, about a four-hour flight from Australia – was largely spared a widespread outbreak. Like many countries in the Pacific, the impact of Covid on Fiji was chiefly economic, as tourism-dependent economies contracted, but there were few deaths.

[How conspiracy theories led to Covid vaccine hesitancy in the Pacific](#)

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By the end of March this year, the country had recorded just two deaths and 70 cases over the entire pandemic. But in April, as people tuned in to watch the government officials, [there was a different story](#): daily case numbers

began climbing. Lockdowns were ordered, curfews put in place, the vaccine rollout was sped up, but [still the cases kept rising](#).

The country has seen daily records broken over and over. On Sunday this week, there were 522 new cases and three Covid-19 deaths. On Monday, there were 352 cases. On Tuesday, Fiji's Ministry of Health and Medical Services [reported 636 new cases](#) of Covid and six deaths for the 24-hour period ending at 8am, both records. Fiji currently has 5,776 active cases in isolation.

[Covid cases](#)

‘It scares me’

Registered nurse Sharon Zibran is up at 5.30am each day to prepare for work, rolling out the national vaccination campaign.

She works in the greater Nakasi area on Fiji's mainland Viti Levu with 50 others, trying to vaccinate the almost 25,000 people who live there.



Nurse Sharon Zibran, left, with colleagues in Nakasi, says that being vaccinated and having adequate PPE gives her confidence to help fight the pandemic Photograph: Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Fiji

Zibran, 31, savours the weekend because it is the only time she gets to be with her two young children. But even then, she is cautious around them, mindful of what she does or where she goes. Sharon has received both doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, the only vaccine option for Fijians at the moment. Just 9% of the target population has been fully vaccinated, with 54% receiving at least one dose.

“Initially I was afraid, especially being a frontline worker. There was that fear, but after receiving the vaccination and provided adequate personal protection equipment, I feel more confident to do my part to help our beautiful nation fight this pandemic and get back on its feet,” says Zibran, who hails from Fiji’s old capital, Levuka, on the island of Ovalau.

“The higher the vaccination rate, the better the protection to our entire families and country. There have been some resistance to the vaccination but once we explained this better to the people that visited us, it helped them overcome their fears.”



Health workers preparing to administer the Covid-19 vaccination in Suva in June. Photograph: Leon Lord/AFP/Getty Images

Jese Smith (not his real name), a registered nurse in the Central Division, is more fearful.

“I’m always afraid. Every day I walk out the door and go to work, I know the risk and the chances of being positive are high. It scares me to think that, if anything happens to me, I’d be leaving my child behind with his grandparents,” says Smith, who has received two doses of AstraZeneca.

He works 14 days straight away from home while attending to Covid cases then undergoes 14 days in isolation before he returns to his family.

It's tough ... [but] at the end of the day, nursing is a calling to serve mankind

Jese Smith, nurse

“As a family, we have adapted to phone and video calls and the usual question always pops up: ‘Dad, when are you coming home, why can’t you stay a little longer, you are always going out.’ These questions always bring me to tears.

“The challenge every day is that I might go to work today and not be certain if I may go home the same day because at any time I can be a primary contact for a Covid-19 positive case and isolate for 14 days. It’s tough.”

It is during those tough times that he constantly reminds himself about this profession that he chose, the work he is passionate about.

“Even though we have Covid-19-positive patients, it hasn’t deterred our care as nurses or a team to make sure that we give our best to our patients ... at the end of the day, nursing is a calling to serve mankind.”

Smith chose to share his experience on the condition of anonymity because he feared speaking to the media might cause him to lose his job, and he has seen the devastating economic impact brought on by Covid-19 nationwide.

The economic juggle

The economic impact on Fiji has been severe.

Fiji's tourism sector, which was valued at more than FJ\$3bn (A\$1.9bn) in 2019, was hit hard – 93% of 279 members of the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association closed down because of a drastic decline in tourist arrivals.

The sector contributes 40% of Fiji's gross domestic product and employs 40,000 Fijians directly, and 100,000 indirectly, according to the association.



Sereana Naituki, front right, with colleagues at the Naviti Resort Fiji before she lost her job

Sereana Naituki, 44, was one of many hospitality workers made redundant because of hotel closures. She worked in hospitality at the Naviti Resort Fiji, on the Coral Coast.

Her husband has also lost his job. While it was a big blow for the family's finances, Naituki says they decided to go back to the land and sea for provisions.

"When we worked at the hotel, we did not have time for these two resources – the land and sea – because we were earning an income from our work at the hotel. But this pandemic really taught us a lesson, and now we farm the land and fish for our sustenance," she says.

“We have a home garden for our tomatoes, okra, eggplant and cabbage. Families in the village also trade the barter system way – root crops in exchange for a bundle of fish, or octopus, and sometimes even chicken.

[Deserted islands: Pacific resorts struggle to survive a year without tourists](#)
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“Our surplus we would sell at the roadside market. A dozen coconuts or heap of vegetables for FJ\$5, a bundle of fresh fish for FJ\$10-\$25, octopus for FJ\$20 and yaqona (kava root) for FJ\$60-\$80/kg.”

Naituki says the villagers have banded together as a community to assist one another and that one positive from the pandemic has been the change to spend more quality time with her husband and children.

Fiji has had to balance the health risks of Covid-19 with the economic impact of widespread lockdowns.

“Developing countries have never successfully implemented total lockdowns,” Fiji’s prime minister, Frank Bainimarama, said last month. “It is easy to call for drastic measures like 28 days of straight lockdown for the whole of Viti Levu if you are still in a high-paying job or have a healthy savings account.

“It is easy to call for a lockdown if you do not depend on day-to-day wages or struggle to pay bills for a business that is closed.

“It is easy to call for a lockdown if you don’t work at a factory that might permanently leave Fiji if they must shut down completely for 28 days; the garment factories and call centres that cannot serve overseas clients will lose those contracts – and the jobs they support – forever.”

He said Fiji would get through this ordeal by an intelligent and targeted application of measures to contain the spread until enough people were vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. Even amid growing concerns about blood clots, he is hoping the AstraZeneca vaccine will provide Fijians with 92% protection against hospitalisation.

“[W]e believe that if we follow some sensible guidelines designed to keep us from gathering indiscriminately in large groups, we can manage this virus while protecting our health, protecting Fijian jobs and businesses and safeguarding the long-term prospects of our young nation,” said Bainimarama.

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New South Wales

‘An error’: health department says Sydney private school students given Pfizer vaccine by mistake

NSW Health agreed to vaccinate Indigenous boarders at St Joseph’s College but ‘through an error’ all year 12 boarders were inoculated

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NSW Health allowed senior students from St Joseph’s College to get the Pfizer vaccine, despite only Australians aged between 40 and 60, and priority groups such as health workers, being eligible. Photograph: Google Earth

NSW Health allowed senior students from St Joseph's College to get the Pfizer vaccine, despite only Australians aged between 40 and 60, and priority groups such as health workers, being eligible. Photograph: Google Earth

[Anne Davies](#) and [Naaman Zhou](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 04.25 EDT

The [New South Wales](#) health department says “an error” resulted in 163 year 12 students at one of Sydney’s most expensive private schools being given the Pfizer vaccine.

St Joseph’s College in [Sydney’s](#) lower north shore confirmed on Tuesday that more than 160 students received their first dose of the vaccine after the state’s health department approved the school’s request.

The school said it was given the go-ahead for the vaccines in May because its boarding school population included Indigenous students and students from remote and regional communities.

The senior students were due to have their second shot when school resumed.

[Australian teachers ask to be vaccinated as frontline workers amid Covid outbreaks](#)

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Guardian Australia understands a private girls school, with a large number of boarders, has also been given access by NSW [Health](#) to the Pfizer vaccine, while most under-40s in Australia are ineligible.

The [Sydney](#) Local Health District, which is part of NSW Health, said an error had led to the entire year 12 cohort at St Joseph’s being vaccinated, instead of just the Aboriginal students.

“Sydney Local Health District was approached by St Joseph’s College in Hunters Hill in relation to the vaccination of Aboriginal students boarding at the school,” the chief executive, Dr Teresa Anderson, said.

“It was agreed that the Aboriginal students would be vaccinated through the state health system at Royal Prince Alfred hospital’s vaccination hub.

“Through an error, the wider group of boarders in year 12, a total of 163 students, were also vaccinated. Sydney Local Health District apologises for this error.”

Earlier on Tuesday, the St Joseph’s College principal, Ross Tarlinton, said: “The college approached Sydney Local Health District in May 2021 to inquire about the possibility of vaccinations for students, given that we have a large number of boys who live in a residential community, which includes boys from rural, remote and Indigenous communities.”

All Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander people aged 16 and over are eligible for the [Pfizer](#) vaccine.

“The approval and administration of the vaccine was endorsed and managed by NSW Health through the Sydney Local Health District,” Tarlinton said. “The college proceeded to make arrangements for the administration of the approved vaccine at a centre determined by NSW Health.”

NSW Health did not respond to questions about whether other boarding schools had received access to vaccines.

“Acknowledging that the college does not determine [vaccination priority](#), it welcomed the opportunity to offer the vaccine for students given the approvals provided,” Tarlinton said.

“The college will continue to encourage and support members of its community to receive the appropriate vaccine as the opportunity arises. St Joseph’s College takes advice from NSW Health and follows public health orders regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.”

[Only people aged between 40 and 60 are officially eligible](#) to receive the Pfizer shot in NSW as well as priority groups such as health workers.

All Aboriginal people aged 16 to 49 years of age are eligible for vaccination, according to the federal government eligibility criteria, as they have a higher risk of acquiring, and developing severe disease from, Covid.

St Joseph's, which takes boarders from both the city and country areas, declined to say how many of its year 12 students were from the regions or how many were Indigenous, citing student privacy.

The chief executive of the Australian Boarding Schools Association, Richard Stokes, said that boarding schools were keen to get students vaccinated as soon as possible.

"Boarding schools involve living in close confines and can be seen to be similar to aged care facilities," he said.

The King's School in Parramatta confirmed that it had been in discussions with NSW Health about vaccinating its students but had not yet received approval.

A spokesperson for the King's School said the school continued to work with the local area health service "to investigate options for vaccinating students".

"King's believes it is important for the wellbeing of all Australians that vaccination rates are expedited."

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My summer of loveDating

My summer of love: ‘I made my move on a coach trip to Kathmandu’

The eight-hour journey provided plenty of time to snuggle up on the back seats - and it turned out this wasn’t just a holiday romance



‘I berated myself for letting the obvious chemistry pass without comment’
... Alex Mistlin. Composite: Alex Mistlin/Getty

‘I berated myself for letting the obvious chemistry pass without comment’
... Alex Mistlin. Composite: Alex Mistlin/Getty

Alex Mistlin

Tue 6 Jul 2021 05.30 EDT

A meet-cute on the Annapurna trail might sound like the premise for a romcom, but, at 19, I was thin-skinned, surly and hadn’t developed the knack of talking to girls my age. Besides, I wasn’t there for a holiday romance; I was in Nepal with my best friend, Sam, and his mother, in whose home I was living at the time.

It says a lot about my state of mind back then that I deemed a bumper quiz book essential for a walking holiday in Nepal. After two solid performances, my Cambridge college was through to the quarter-finals of University Challenge, and bringing the book was a sign that I was finally taking it seriously.

The trek began with a briefing at the rooftop bar of our hotel in Kathmandu. As I half-listened to our guide explain that the four-day trek would be “harder than you might think”, I surveyed the eclectic group with whom I’d be sharing the journey. To my relief, among the ripped octogenarians and sunburnt Australians was an English girl my age.

“Great. There will be someone else to talk to when Sam and I need a break from each other,” I thought.

We set off the next day and the girl and I soon found ourselves alone together on the roadside. First impressions were good: she was in the same year as me at university (we even had a couple of mutual friends) and I took the opportunity to impress her with news of my upcoming University Challenge appearance.



Mistlin on University Challenge. Photograph: BBC

The more time I spent with her, the more I was surprised by how well we got on. She was shy but insightful, and happy to tease Sam and me about our relentless politics chat.

We barely got a moment alone, though, until the final night of the trek. We were the last two awake after the rest of the party had drunkenly stumbled back to their huts. Over the course of the evening, a romance blossomed between us as we shared our fears and anxieties, and discussed what we hoped the future would hold after university. Would it be possible to find jobs that were fulfilling and wouldn't require us to compromise on our beliefs once we graduated? And did "succeeding" in the UK inevitably mean moving to London?

Afterwards, I berated myself for letting the obvious chemistry pass without comment. It wasn't just that I feared rejection – the trip was ending, we lived in different cities and there was no prospect that our bond would survive back in "the real world". Even so, I wished I'd said something. And so, in time-honoured tradition, I decided to make my move on the coach trip back to Kathmandu.

By then, the mutual attraction was obvious and the eight-hour journey provided plenty of time for us to snuggle up on the back seats – a fairly bold display of affection, given her mum was sitting just seven rows ahead.

Arriving back at the hotel, sweaty and exhausted, we only had time to exchange numbers before a cab whisked her away to her separate accommodation. As her car pulled up, there was an unbearable silence; I didn't want to say goodbye but knew this was the moment.

In the end, I blurted out: "I can get you and your mum tickets to the next round of University Challenge, if you like?"

The line earned me only an awkward peck, but at least we had a first date in the diary.

My team went on to lose both our quarter-final matches, but she was there in the audience for both. We became a couple and even went on our own travel

adventures, Interrailing around Europe – only this time I left my bumper quiz book at home.

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My summer of loveDating

My summer of love: ‘One-night stands are often regrettable. This one was the perfect gift’

Our night in the shadow of Arthur’s Seat in Edinburgh was hot, satisfying and as cheery as you could ever hope for



‘A perfectly executed situation’ ... Hannah Jane Parkinson on the ‘buff beat’ at the Edinburgh festival. Composite: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian; Getty
‘A perfectly executed situation’ ... Hannah Jane Parkinson on the ‘buff beat’ at the Edinburgh festival. Composite: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian; Getty



[Hannah Jane Parkinson](#)

[@ladyhaja](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

A couple of years ago, before the world shut down, the Guardian sent me to the Edinburgh festival to write a [piece on all of the nude shows](#) taking place that year (there was a record number). This is the type of extremely fun commission that journalists dream of, and this particular piece resulted in me being on the cover of G2, smiling, with the strapline: “Fifteen naked people, and that was just Monday!”

It was a work trip that was as much fun socially as it was professionally. The weather was glorious, for the most part, and the atmosphere buoyant. A few people I knew were also there for the festival, and I had time to see them. In particular, a woman I had known tangentially a decade ago, when we both lived in Oxford. At the time, we were both sleeping with men. I was at a college of further education; she was studying at drama school. She was fun and smart and free-spirited, but our paths only crossed at parties. I couldn’t in all certainty tell you if we’d ever had a sober conversation – but I am pretty sure we had kissed a lot of the same guys.

In 2013, I was surprised when she arrived, for a three-week stint, in the London office of the website I was writing for at the time. It was great to see her again, but we didn't meet up afterwards. We followed each other on Instagram and Twitter, however, and messaged sometimes, and it slowly became apparent that she was sleeping with women – as was I.

She was going to be in Edinburgh for the festival. I was newly single, bruised, and, after those years of “We should hang out!”, we finally made a firm plan to meet up. It amuses me that it took us both being far away from home.

We met in a pub that had what I can only describe as giant pits of cushions for seating, which instantly threw us into close proximity. I had no idea whether she was single and, even if she was, whether she was remotely attracted to me. The age-old dance of brushing thighs, extended eye contact and fingers touching when drinks were passed commenced.

By the time we moved on – to perhaps one of the maddest bars I have ever been to, a converted church, in which a full-size model of Frankenstein's monster was mechanically lowered from the ceiling every hour, on the hour, while green strobes lit up the arches – we were drunk, and having a blast. When we slipped into a booth for a dance break, we finally ended up kissing. It felt like scoring a penalty after the longest run-up. Both of us, almost giggling like teenagers, admitting: “I wasn’t sure whether you ...” We both, evidently, did.



Room with a view ... Salisbury Crags from Hannah Jane Parkinson's window, with Arthur's Seat just out of shot. Photograph: Instagram/ladyhaja

I was staying in the smallest possible room of a summer-vacated university halls, with a single bed (look, journalism budgets aren't what they once were) and a window ledge that doubled as a desk. The upside? A stunning, unparalleled view of Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat.

It is, of course, superficial to focus on the fact that someone has a wonderful body, and it certainly isn't a requisite in finding a partner attractive – most of us would be in trouble if it were. But, sorry, she did. It was the kind of sex that is extremely hot and satisfying, but also characterised by a lightness and cheeriness, an acknowledgment of the perfectly executed situation we had found ourselves in.

We fell asleep, limbs tangled, my head on her breast. In the morning, the first thing we saw was the Crags against a bright-blue sky through the unclosed curtains. I got what I call "wee stage fright" – given the bathroom was essentially an echoey cupboard – and she played, appropriately, Enya's *Orinoco Flow* from her phone for my ease, which made me laugh.

I filed my piece and travelled back to London; she went to stay with friends. We texted for a while, and she sent me a beautiful handwritten letter with a

crystal enclosed. But I soon realised I was still too raw from my breakup to enter into a relationship, and she moved to Brighton not long after, where she appears to have acquired a very nice girlfriend and a lovely cat.

During the past year, while the theatre, travel and dating have been off limits, I've been thinking about that trip and what a great time I had. One-night stands are often messy and regrettable, but this one was perfect and felt like a gift. It might have lasted only 24 hours – but it's definitely the best summer romance I have had.

This article was amended on 6 July 2021 to clarify that, while Arthur's Seat is visible from the window shown in Hannah Jane Parkinson's photograph, the image shows Salisbury Crags.

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Photograph: Jonathan Knowles/Getty Images

[The long read](#)

The invisible addiction: is it time to give up caffeine?

Photograph: Jonathan Knowles/Getty Images

Caffeine makes us more energetic, efficient and faster. But we have become so dependent that we need it just to get to our baseline

by [Michael Pollan](#)

Tue 6 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

After years of starting the day with a tall morning coffee, followed by several glasses of green tea at intervals, and the occasional cappuccino after lunch, I quit caffeine, cold turkey. It was not something that I particularly wanted to do, but I had come to the reluctant conclusion that the story I was writing demanded it. Several of the experts I was interviewing had suggested that I really couldn't understand the role of caffeine in my life – its invisible yet pervasive power – without getting off it and then, presumably, getting back on. Roland Griffiths, one of the world's leading researchers of mood-altering drugs, and the man most responsible for getting the diagnosis of "caffeine withdrawal" included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the bible of psychiatric diagnoses, told me he hadn't begun to understand his own relationship with caffeine until he stopped using it and conducted a series of self-experiments. He urged me to do the same.

For most of us, to be caffeinated to one degree or another has simply become baseline human consciousness. Something like 90% of humans ingest caffeine regularly, making it the most widely used psychoactive drug in the world, and the only one we routinely give to children (commonly in the form of fizzy drinks). Few of us even think of it as a drug, much less our daily use of it as an addiction. It's so pervasive that it's easy to overlook the fact that to be caffeinated is not baseline consciousness but, in fact, an altered state. It just happens to be a state that virtually all of us share, rendering it invisible.

The scientists have spelled out, and I had duly noted, the predictable symptoms of caffeine withdrawal: headache, fatigue, lethargy, difficulty concentrating, decreased motivation, irritability, intense distress, loss of confidence and dysphoria. But beneath that deceptively mild rubric of "difficulty concentrating" hides nothing short of an existential threat to the work of the writer. How can you possibly expect to write anything when you can't concentrate?

I postponed it as long as I could, but finally the dark day arrived. According to the researchers I'd interviewed, the process of withdrawal had actually begun overnight, while I was sleeping, during the "trough" in the graph of caffeine's diurnal effects. The day's first cup of tea or coffee acquires most of its power – its joy! – not so much from its euphoric and stimulating properties than from the fact that it is suppressing the emerging symptoms of withdrawal. This is part of the insidiousness of caffeine. Its mode of action, or "pharmacodynamics", mesh so perfectly with the rhythms of the human body that the morning cup of coffee arrives just in time to head off the looming mental distress set in motion by yesterday's cup of coffee. Daily, caffeine proposes itself as the optimal solution to the problem caffeine creates.

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At the coffee shop, instead of my usual "half caff", I ordered a cup of mint tea. And on this morning, that lovely dispersal of the mental fog that the first hit of caffeine ushers into consciousness never arrived. The fog settled over me and would not budge. It's not that I felt terrible – I never got a serious headache – but all day long I felt a certain muzziness, as if a veil had descended in the space between me and reality, a kind of filter that absorbed certain wavelengths of light and sound.

I was able to do some work, but distractedly. "I feel like an unsharpened pencil," I wrote in my notebook. "Things on the periphery intrude, and won't be ignored. I can't focus for more than a minute."

Over the course of the next few days, I began to feel better, the veil lifted, yet I was still not quite myself, and neither, quite, was the world. In this new normal, the world seemed duller to me. I seemed duller, too. Mornings were the worst. I came to see how integral caffeine is to the daily work of knitting ourselves back together after the fraying of consciousness during sleep. That reconsolidation of self took much longer than usual, and never quite felt complete.

Humanity's acquaintance with caffeine is surprisingly recent. But it is hardly an exaggeration to say that this molecule remade the world. The changes

wrought by coffee and tea occurred at a fundamental level – the level of the human mind. [Coffee](#) and tea ushered in a shift in the mental weather, sharpening minds that had been fogged by alcohol, freeing people from the natural rhythms of the body and the sun, thus making possible whole new kinds of work and, arguably, new kinds of thought, too.

By the 15th century, coffee was being cultivated in east Africa and traded across the Arabian peninsula. Initially, the new drink was regarded as an aide to concentration and used by Sufis in Yemen to keep them from dozing off during their religious observances. (Tea, too, started out as a little helper for Buddhist monks striving to stay awake through long stretches of meditation.) Within a century, coffeehouses had sprung up in cities across the Arab world. In 1570 there were more than 600 of them in Constantinople alone, and they spread north and west with the Ottoman empire.

The Islamic world at this time was in many respects more advanced than Europe, in science and technology, and in learning. Whether this mental flourishing had anything to do with the prevalence of coffee (and prohibition of alcohol) is difficult to prove, but as the German historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch has argued, the beverage “seemed to be tailor-made for a culture that forbade alcohol consumption and gave birth to modern mathematics”.



A coffee house in 17th-century London. Photograph: Lordprice Collection/Alamy

In 1629 the first coffeehouses in Europe, styled on the Arab model, popped up in Venice, and the first such establishment in England was opened in Oxford in 1650 by a Jewish immigrant. They arrived in London shortly thereafter, and proliferated: within a few decades there were thousands of coffeehouses in London; at their peak, one for every 200 Londoners.

To call the English coffeehouse a new kind of public space doesn't quite do it justice. You paid a penny for the coffee, but the information – in the form of newspapers, books, magazines and conversation – was free. (Coffeehouses were often referred to as "penny universities".) After visiting London coffeehouses, a French writer named Maximilien Misson wrote, "You have all Manner of News there; You have a good fire, which you may sit by as long as you please: You have a Dish of Coffee; you meet your Friends for the Transaction of Business, and all for a Penny, if you don't care to spend more."

London's coffeehouses were distinguished one from another by the professional or intellectual interests of their patrons, which eventually gave them specific institutional identities. So, for example, merchants and men with interests in shipping gathered at Lloyd's Coffee House. Here you could learn what ships were arriving and departing, and buy an insurance policy on your cargo. Lloyd's Coffee House eventually became the insurance brokerage Lloyd's of London. Learned types and scientists – known then as "natural philosophers" – gathered at the Grecian, which became closely associated with the Royal Society; Isaac Newton and Edmond Halley debated physics and mathematics here, and supposedly once dissected a dolphin on the premises.

The conversation in London's coffee houses frequently turned to politics, in vigorous exercises of free speech that drew the ire of the government, especially after the monarchy was restored in 1660. Charles II, worried that plots were being hatched in coffeehouses, decided that the places were dangerous fomenters of rebellion that the crown needed to suppress. In 1675 the king moved to close down the coffeehouses, on the grounds that the "false, malicious and scandalous Reports" emanating therefrom were a

“Disturbance of the Quiet and Peace of the Realm”. Like so many other compounds that change the qualities of consciousness in individuals, caffeine was regarded as a threat to institutional power, which moved to suppress it, in a foreshadowing of the wars against drugs to come.

But the king’s war against coffee lasted only 11 days. Charles discovered that it was too late to turn back the tide of caffeine. By then the coffeehouse was such a fixture of English culture and daily life – and so many eminent Londoners had become addicted to caffeine – that everyone simply ignored the king’s order and blithely went on drinking coffee. Afraid to test his authority and find it lacking, the king quietly backed down, issuing a second proclamation rolling back the first “out of princely consideration and royal compassion”.

It’s hard to imagine that the sort of political, cultural and intellectual ferment that bubbled up in the coffeehouses of both France and England in the 17th century would ever have developed in a tavern. The kind of magical thinking that alcohol sponsored in the medieval mind began to yield to a new spirit of rationalism and, a bit later, Enlightenment thinking. French historian Jules Michelet wrote: “Coffee, the sober drink, the mighty nourishment of the brain, which unlike other spirits, heightens purity and lucidity; coffee, which clears the clouds of the imagination and their gloomy weight; which illuminates the reality of things suddenly with the flash of truth.”

To see, lucidly, “the reality of things”: this was, in a nutshell, the rationalist project. Coffee became, along with the microscope, telescope and the pen, one of its indispensable tools.

After a few weeks, the mental impairments of withdrawal had subsided, and I could once again think in a straight line, hold an abstraction in my head for more than two minutes, and shut peripheral thoughts out of my field of attention. Yet I continued to feel as though I was mentally just slightly behind the curve, especially when in the company of drinkers of coffee and tea, which, of course, was all the time and everywhere.

Here's what I was missing: I missed the way caffeine and its rituals used to order my day, especially in the morning. Herbal teas – which are barely, if at all, psychoactive – lack the power of coffee and tea to organise the day into a rhythm of energetic peaks and valleys, as the mental tide of caffeine ebbs and flows. The morning surge is a blessing, obviously, but there is also something comforting in the ebb tide of afternoon, which a cup of tea can gently reverse.

At some point I began to wonder if perhaps it was all in my head, this sense that I had lost a mental step since getting off coffee and tea. So I decided to look at the science, to learn what, if any, cognitive enhancement can actually be attributed to caffeine. I found numerous studies conducted over the years reporting that caffeine improves performance on a range of cognitive measures – of memory, focus, alertness, vigilance, attention and learning. An experiment done in the 1930s found that chess players on caffeine performed significantly better than players who abstained. In another study, caffeine users completed a variety of mental tasks more quickly, though they made more errors; as one paper put it in its title, people on caffeine are “faster, but not smarter”. In a 2014 experiment, subjects given caffeine immediately after learning new material remembered it better than subjects who received a placebo. Tests of psychomotor abilities also suggest that caffeine gives us an edge: in simulated driving exercises, caffeine improves performance, especially when the subject is tired. It also enhances physical performance on such metrics as time trials, muscle strength and endurance.

True, there is reason to take these findings with a pinch of salt, if only because this kind of research is difficult to do well. The problem is finding a good control group in a society in which virtually everyone is addicted to caffeine. But the consensus seems to be that caffeine does improve mental (and physical) performance to some degree.

Whether caffeine also enhances creativity is a different question, however, and there's some reason to doubt that it does. Caffeine improves our focus and ability to concentrate, which surely enhances linear and abstract thinking, but creativity works very differently. It may depend on the loss of a certain kind of focus, and the freedom to let the mind off the leash of linear thought.

Cognitive psychologists sometimes talk in terms of two distinct types of consciousness: spotlight consciousness, which illuminates a single focal point of attention, making it very good for reasoning, and lantern consciousness, in which attention is less focused yet illuminates a broader field of attention. Young children tend to exhibit lantern consciousness; so do many people on psychedelics. This more diffuse form of attention lends itself to mind wandering, free association, and the making of novel connections – all of which can nourish creativity. By comparison, caffeine's big contribution to human progress has been to intensify spotlight consciousness – the focused, linear, abstract and efficient cognitive processing more closely associated with mental work than play. This, more than anything else, is what made caffeine the perfect drug not only for the age of reason and the Enlightenment, but for the rise of capitalism, too.

The power of caffeine to keep us awake and alert, to stem the natural tide of exhaustion, freed us from the circadian rhythms of our biology and so, along with the advent of artificial light, opened the frontier of night to the possibilities of work.

What coffee did for clerks and intellectuals, tea would soon do for the English working class. Indeed, it was tea from the East Indies – heavily sweetened with sugar from the West Indies – that fuelled the Industrial Revolution. We think of England as a tea culture, but coffee, initially the cheaper beverage by far, dominated at first.

Soon after the [British East India Company](#) began trading with China, cheap tea flooded England. A beverage that only the well-to-do could afford to drink in 1700 was by 1800 consumed by virtually everyone, from the society matron to the factory worker.



Tea pickers in Assam, India. Photograph: AFP/Getty

To supply this demand required an imperialist enterprise of enormous scale and brutality, especially after the British decided it would be more profitable to turn India, [its colony](#), into a tea producer, than to buy tea from the Chinese. This required first stealing the secrets of tea production from the Chinese (a mission accomplished by the renowned Scots botanist and plant explorer [Robert Fortune](#), disguised as a mandarin); seizing land from peasant farmers in Assam (where tea grew wild), and then forcing the farmers [into servitude](#), picking tea leaves from dawn to dusk. The introduction of tea to the west was all about exploitation – the extraction of surplus value from labour, not only in its production in India, but in its consumption by the British as well.

Tea allowed the British working class to endure long shifts, brutal working conditions and more or less constant hunger; the caffeine helped quiet the hunger pangs, and the sugar in it became a crucial source of calories. (From a strictly nutritional standpoint, workers would have been better off sticking with beer.) The caffeine in tea helped create a new kind of worker, one better adapted to the rule of the machine. It is difficult to imagine an Industrial Revolution without it.

So how exactly does coffee, and caffeine more generally, make us more energetic, efficient and faster? How could this little molecule possibly supply the human body energy without calories? Could caffeine be the proverbial free lunch, or do we pay a price for the mental and physical energy – the alertness, focus and stamina – that caffeine gives us?

Alas, there is no free lunch. It turns out that caffeine only appears to give us energy. Caffeine works by blocking the action of adenosine, a molecule that gradually accumulates in the brain over the course of the day, preparing the body to rest. Caffeine molecules interfere with this process, keeping adenosine from doing its job – and keeping us feeling alert. But adenosine levels continue to rise, so that when the caffeine is eventually metabolised, the adenosine floods the body's receptors and tiredness returns. So the energy that caffeine gives us is borrowed, in effect, and eventually the debt must be paid back.

For as long as people have been drinking coffee and tea, medical authorities have warned about the dangers of caffeine. But until now, caffeine has been cleared of the most serious charges against it. The current scientific consensus is more than reassuring – in fact, the research suggests that coffee and tea, far from being deleterious to our health, may offer some important benefits, as long as they aren't consumed to excess. Regular coffee consumption is associated with a decreased risk of several cancers (including breast, prostate, colorectal and endometrial), cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's disease, dementia and possibly depression and suicide. (Though high doses can produce nervousness and anxiety, and rates of suicide climb among those who drink eight or more cups a day.)

My review of the medical literature on coffee and tea made me wonder if my abstention might be compromising not only my mental function but my physical health, as well. However, that was before I spoke to Matt Walker.

An English neuroscientist on the faculty at University of California, Berkeley, Walker, author of [Why We Sleep](#), is single-minded in his mission: to alert the world to an invisible public-health crisis, which is that we are not getting nearly enough sleep, the sleep we are getting is of poor quality, and a principal culprit in this crime against body and mind is caffeine. Caffeine

itself might not be bad for you, but the sleep it's stealing from you may have a price. According to Walker, research suggests that insufficient sleep may be a key factor in the development of Alzheimer's disease, arteriosclerosis, stroke, heart failure, depression, anxiety, suicide and obesity. "The shorter you sleep," he bluntly concludes, "the shorter your lifespan."

Walker grew up in England drinking copious amounts of black tea, morning, noon and night. He no longer consumes caffeine, save for the small amounts in his occasional cup of decaf. In fact, none of the sleep researchers or experts on circadian rhythms I interviewed for this story use caffeine.



Photograph: Stockimo/Alamy

Walker explained that, for most people, the "quarter life" of caffeine is usually about 12 hours, meaning that 25% of the caffeine in a cup of coffee consumed at noon is still circulating in your brain when you go to bed at midnight. That could well be enough to completely wreck your deep sleep.

I thought of myself as a pretty good sleeper before I met Walker. At lunch he probed me about my sleep habits. I told him I usually get a solid seven hours, fall asleep easily, dream most nights.

"How many times a night do you wake up?" he asked. I'm up three or four times a night (usually to pee), but I almost always fall right back to sleep.

He nodded gravely. “That’s really not good, all those interruptions. Sleep quality is just as important as sleep quantity.” The interruptions were undermining the amount of “deep” or “slow wave” sleep I was getting, something above and beyond the REM sleep I had always thought was the measure of a good night’s rest. But it seems that deep sleep is just as important to our health, and the amount we get tends to decline with age.

Caffeine is not the sole cause of our sleep crisis; screens, alcohol (which is as hard on REM sleep as caffeine is on deep sleep), pharmaceuticals, work schedules, noise and light pollution, and anxiety can all play a role in undermining both the duration and quality of our sleep. But here’s what’s uniquely insidious about caffeine: the drug is not only a leading cause of our sleep deprivation; it is also the principal tool we rely on to remedy the problem. Most of the caffeine consumed today is being used to compensate for the lousy sleep that caffeine causes – which means that caffeine is helping to hide from our awareness the very problem that caffeine creates.

The time came to wrap up my experiment in caffeine deprivation. I was eager to see what a body that had been innocent of caffeine for three months would experience when subjected to a couple of shots of espresso. I had thought long and hard about what kind of coffee I would get, and where. I opted for a “special”, my local coffee shop’s term for a double-shot espresso made with less steamed milk than a typical cappuccino; it’s more commonly known as a flat white.

My special was unbelievably good, a ringing reminder of what a poor counterfeit decaf is; here were whole dimensions and depths of flavour that I had completely forgotten about. Everything in my visual field seemed pleasantly italicised, filmic, and I wondered if all these people with their cardboard-sleeve-swaddled cups had any idea what a powerful drug they were sipping. But how could they?

They had long ago become habituated to caffeine, and were now using it for another purpose entirely. Baseline maintenance, that is, plus a welcome little lift. I felt lucky that this more powerful experience was available to me. This – along with the stellar sleeps – was the wonderful dividend of my investment in abstention.

And yet in a few days' time I would be them, caffeine-tolerant and addicted all over again. I wondered: was there any way to preserve the power of this drug? Could I devise a new relationship with caffeine? Maybe treat it more like a psychedelic – say, something to be taken only on occasion, and with a greater degree of ceremony and intention. Maybe just drink coffee on Saturdays? Just the one.

[How Nespresso's coffee revolution got ground down](#)

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When I got home I tackled my to-do list with unaccustomed fervour, harnessing the surge of energy – of focus! – coursing through me, and put it to good use. I compulsively cleared and decluttered – on the computer, in my closet, in the garden and the shed. I raked, I weeded, I put things in order, as if I were possessed. Whatever I focused on, I focused on zealously and single-mindedly.

Around noon, my compulsiveness began to subside, and I felt ready for a change of scene. I had yanked a few plants out of the vegetable garden that were not pulling their weight, and decided to go to the garden centre to buy some replacements. It was during the drive that I realised the true reason I was heading to this particular garden centre: it had this Airstream trailer parked out front that served really good espresso.

This is an edited extract from [This Is Your Mind on Plants: Opium-Caffeine-Mescaline](#) by Michael Pollan, published by Allen Lane on 8 July and available at [guardianbookshop.co.uk](#)

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Wimbledon

‘A very bright future’: Praise for Emma Raducanu as Wimbledon run ends

18-year-old tennis player, youngest British woman to reach last 16 in Open era, retired in fourth round

03:55

Wimbledon day seven: Federer and Djokovic advance, Raducanu retires – video highlights



Sean Ingle
@seaningle

Mon 5 Jul 2021 17.22 EDT

Emma Raducanu’s gloriously unexpected Wimbledon adventure ended in sadness on Monday as the 18-year-old from Kent was forced to retire from her last-16 match after appearing to hyperventilate on court.

Urged on by a packed Court No 1 crowd, and with millions watching on primetime BBC One, the A-level student started to grimace and hold her

stomach during the first set of her match against Ajla Tomljanović, which she lost 4-6.

[Emma Raducanu out of Wimbledon after retiring with medical problem](#)

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At the start of the second set, she was increasingly struggling to breathe, which necessitated a medical timeout at 0-3. As she was being treated, the trainer told her to “take a deep breath, you can do it. You’re OK.” Shortly afterwards it was decided Raducanu could not continue.

Nerves may have played their part. And understandably so. A month ago Raducanu had never played a match on the main women’s tour. Now, suddenly, she was centre stage as the youngest British woman to reach the fourth round in the Open era.

Speaking after the match, Tomjlanović said that she wasn’t 100% sure why Raducanu had pulled out but hinted it was related to anxiety. “I have experienced something similar but not to that extent,” she said. “I know that it’s a real thing. I’ve spoken to athletes that have gone through that. It’s not easy.”

John McEnroe, who won Wimbledon three times, said Raducanu’s retirement could stand her in good stead for the future. “Maybe it’s not a shame this has happened right now when she is 18. I played this event for the first time when I was 18 and I was able to qualify and go to the semi-finals and I felt it was overwhelming, the change in my life.

“In a way I was happy I lost. It allowed me to be a kid. I went to college for a year. I was able to get an understanding of what it was going to take to make it on the circuit – what it would entail emotionally, mentally, physically.

“I think seeing those expectations drop a little bit [will] allow her to take a couple of deep breaths.”

Wimbledon confirmed late on Monday evening that Raducanu retired [because of breathing difficulties](#).



Emma Raducanu is checked by a doctor before going off court. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Despite this defeat, there was still an overwhelming sense of a new star forming and catching light. Having entered Wimbledon ranked 338 in the world, and with career earnings of just £27,000, Raducanu leaves having catapulted more than 150 places and £182,000 richer.

Marcel Knobil, founder of the Brand Council consultancy, believes this is just the start. “She has so many qualities that brands would love to be associated with,” he said. “She’s multicultural, young and successful. And in a post-Brexit scenario we’re looking for someone to represent pride in the UK. She’s also very attractive, and looks matter.”

[John McEnroe slammed for comments over Emma Raducanu withdrawal](#)
[Read more](#)

He said Raducanu had already secured sponsorship from the sports brands Nike and Wilson and was a solid prospect for the future. “[Fame] can evaporate very quickly, but that doesn’t seem to be the case here. Especially in a climate where we’ve been so down in the doldrums. We’re looking for an opportunity to raise optimism and brands want to be associated with that.”

Raducanu's business interests off the court will be represented by Max Eisenbud, one of tennis's most powerful super agents, who helped the former grand slam champion Maria Sharapova earn up to £20m a year in sponsorships.

Raducanu's run at these championships did not come as a surprise to Luke Ralph, 18, a schoolfriend who used to train with her at the Bromley tennis centre. He recalled how she would practise her serves by herself in the dark, at 13 years old.

"She was the kind of person who just had that dedication to do anything she could, really," he said. "We were probably just going home for dinner, wanting to get back and she was just out there training so I think it's a sign of her character, that determination."

Those sentiments were echoed by Harry Bushnell, who coached Raducanu at the Parklangley Club in Beckenham, Kent, from when she was six to 11 years old. He said: "I've known Emma since she was six. She was in the sessions aimed at the younger children and it was very apparent, very early on, that she stood out."

Bushnell also paid tribute to her mum, Renee, who is from China, and her dad, Ian, from Romania. "It really is a well-grounded machine. It's a great combination of Ian, the dad, who is the driving force behind the tennis and the mum who is there saying, 'you've still got to study', and it's always worked well."



Renee Raducanu (right), mother of Emma, is consoled as her daughter is helped from the court. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Raducanu, who will get the results of her A-levels in maths and economics in the coming weeks, has benefited from being part of the Lawn [Tennis](#) Association's 12 Pro scholarship programme, which helps provide funds and coaching to Britain's best talent.

[Angelique Kerber blasts past Coco Gauff and into Wimbledon quarter-final](#)
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LTA coach Matt James told the Guardian that her remarkable run at Wimbledon had been built on even broader foundations. “One of the best things with Emma is that she was exposed to a lot of sports early on,” he said. “She was doing golf, ballet, motocross and horse riding from a very early age. It means that when she’s learning a new skill, she has the ability to pick things up very quickly.”

James also said he expected Raducanu’s success this year to inspire the next wave of British female tennis stars. “She has such a great attitude,” he added.

Those sentiments were echoed by the LTA's head of women's tennis, Iain Bates, but he also urged her fans to keep things in perspective. "It was Emma's first Wimbledon and she only played her first match on tour three weeks ago," he pointed out. "But all the evidence we have seen this week suggests she has a very bright future."

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Priti Patel rattles the handcuffs – but the Tories have lost control of law and order

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Justice in England and Wales is on its knees, with huge court delays adding to the suffering of crime victims and grieving families



Priti Patel during a foot patrol with new police recruits around Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, January 2021. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Priti Patel during a foot patrol with new police recruits around Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, January 2021. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Tue 6 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Justice is grinding to a halt. The handcuff-rattling home secretary, Priti Patel, likes announcing draconian new sentences – but without adequate police, prisons and, above all, law courts to hear cases, her bombast is empty.

Justice delayed is justice denied when a four-year-old alleged victim of sexual abuse has to wait so long – purely for lack of court time – that they could be aged eight before their case reaches court. What will they remember? The defence can make a reasonable argument to the jury that after so long, such a young child's memory will be unreliable. That's not exceptional, just one case I have come across while interviewing solicitors.

Court delays deny justice to victims, to witnesses fast forgetting what they saw, to the guilty who should face consequences quickly, to the innocent wrongly locked up on remand or with a cloud hanging over them, and to anyone else expecting legal redress. [Figures](#) for late May show more than 57,000 cases waiting for crown court hearings, and more than 450,000

waiting for magistrates courts. The pandemic worsened an existing crisis: there was a 37,000 crown court backlog in 2019.

[Crown court backlog has reached 'crisis levels', report warns](#)

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In the tsunami of post-2010 cuts to the Ministry of Justice, half the crown courts and [magistrates courts](#) were closed down and sold off. The government says most people can reach a court within a six-hour round trip, but unsurprisingly many are [failing to attend](#), so those showing up find cases postponed and themselves obliged to make that journey again. Added to the loss of courtrooms is an acute shortage of judges, recorders, clerks, staff and duty solicitors following [£1bn in legal aid cuts](#).

“Your letter made a mistake,” complained one client to Richard Atkinson, a solicitor in Maidstone, Kent, last week. “You put my trial date as October 2022. You meant 2021?” No, replied Atkinson, who is also a member of the Law Society’s criminal justice committee: that was the date – it was set back five years after his client was arrested for fraud in 2017, purely due to lack of a crown court slot. “They’re already listing cases for 2023,” Atkinson says wearily, adding that many cases received no date “because if they were listed, it would be 2024”.

Every kind of justice is blocked. It takes [34 weeks](#) to get a hearing for unfair dismissal from an employment tribunal. The backlog of cases was already at [36,000 pre-Covid](#) – a wait so long that a third now give up. Coroner’s courts leave grieving families to wait a year, while family courts are backed up too.

Cris McCurley, a family solicitor in Newcastle, sounds utterly distraught. “Every part of the system suffered cuts, with a massive rise in domestic abuse.” [Three in four domestic abuse cases](#) in England and Wales are dropped before coming to trial. “It’s a perfect storm. I’ve never encountered so much raw emotion.” She talks of desperate cases, such as the mother made homeless by an abusive husband amid an acute shortage of refuge places. “I can’t get a hearing listed, and waiting makes emotions rougher.”

The government may hide all problems behind the pandemic, but in researching the book [The Lost Decade](#), I sat in on the only grant-aided

advice centre for parents facing family courts. I heard a nurse, terrified that her foreign ex-husband was about to steal her children, whose passports he holds. Before the cuts she'd have had a legal aid solicitor.

During the 2010s, the number of police officers was cut by [15%](#), community support officers by 40%, prison officers by [26%](#); [51%](#) of council youth centres in England were closed, and knife crime [soared](#). The Tories inherited from Labour falling numbers of reported crimes, which [increased](#) as the cuts hit home.

[Lawyers counsel against ‘virtual hearings’ to tackle backlog of cases](#)

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Jimmy McGovern's TV drama [Time](#) tells the prison story: with about 80,000 inmates in England and Wales now, the astonishing official projection is a rise to 98,700 over the next five years. That anticipates the home secretary's penchant for regular punishment fixes: Patel's eye-catcher this week is a [four-year sentence](#) for anyone entering Britain illegally.

Atkinson says prisons this year have been “the worst I’ve seen”, with inmates “locked in 23 hours a day since Covid, with no family visits for a year. People are in custody with no trial date, yet if they’re acquitted, there is no compensation.” Rehabilitation? Cuts since 2010 have led to [62% fewer courses](#) being taken by prisoners.

Visiting Woodhill prison in Milton Keynes, observing an exceptionally fractious prisoner among a jail full of reoffenders, I asked the governor, Nikki Marfleet, what would best keep them out? “Sure Start,” she said without hesitation, “to help families from the day a baby’s born. Damage is done so young: that’s where I’d put resources.” But [Sure Start](#) too has been reduced to rubble since 2010.

All this makes law-and-order Tories vulnerable, with concerns about crime raised in recent by-elections. All civilisation rests on trust in the law. As victims, witnesses and local communities find the courts seized up with no redress for years, leaving thousands in limbo, Labour needs to capture crime and its causes as its own territory.

It's time for Labour to abandon squeamishness about anything that smacks of tough-talk crowd-pleasing: this government's dereliction of duty undermines the bedrock assumptions of any decent society. There's no one better placed than Labour's leader – a former director of public prosecutions – to expose the gulf between Priti Patel's posturing and the law-and-order reality.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist.
 - This article was amended on 6 July 2021 to correct Richard Atkinson's role in the Law Society.
-

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If working from home becomes the norm, housing inequality will deepen

[Susanna Rustin](#)

There are undoubtedly upsides to remote working, but renters will ultimately lose out to property owners and landlords



‘Homes are where owners’ cash is, as well as their hearts.’ Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

‘Homes are where owners’ cash is, as well as their hearts.’ Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

Tue 6 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

The [latest voice](#) to sing the praises of working from home is the Climate Change Committee. It is pushing at an open door: with a commitment to flexible working in the Conservative manifesto, and [Labour pushing the government](#) to bring forward new laws, it is all but certain that the number of people going to work in offices every day will be lower after the pandemic than it was before.

The number of workers to whom such changes apply must not be overstated. Official [figures report only about 26%](#) of people working from home (WFH) in 2020. Geographical and sectoral variations are huge: fewer than 14% of people in Middlesbrough worked from home compared with more than 70% in Richmond upon Thames. [In Scotland](#), 70% of people employed in communications worked remotely, but just 7% in the accommodation and food industries, perhaps not surprisingly.

It is easy to see why working remotely is viewed as an attractive prospect. Most of us like being in our own place, surrounded by our own things. By contrast, work is widely associated with stress and difficulty, at least some of the time. The TUC strongly supports more flexibility, not only with regard to location but also hours (making it an option for more people). Cutting down on commuting, which is necessary to reduce carbon emissions, would also bring benefits to those saved from the expense and discomfort of rush hours.

For some groups the gains are plain to see. The rise in online activity has meant the past year has [offered opportunities](#) to disabled people that were previously off limits. For those struggling with housing costs, including younger adults in the south-east where rents are highest, the switch to remote working offers the possibility of living somewhere cheaper while keeping the same job. For families with children, flexibility has long been highly prized for making care easier.

[‘Idea of commuting fills me with dread’: workers on returning to the office](#)
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It will take time to assess how such changes stack up against the downsides of shrinking workplaces. These include the risk that a hybrid model, whereby people divide their time between home and work, will turn out to penalise those who are on the video call rather than in the room when decisions are taken. Judging from pandemic trends, which saw women take up the bulk of additional domestic tasks, including home schooling, it appears likely that the losers in this situation [would be women](#). There are questions too about the transmission of knowledge, and whether younger employees stand to lose out on opportunities of mentorship and learning. How important is it to organisations that their people share the same space, eat together and so on? How do we quantify the informal effects of people

physically working alongside each other – making and losing friends, falling in love? What about the 7.9 million people in the UK who live alone?

That there is no one-size-fits-all should be no surprise: there are about 30 million workers on a payroll in the UK, plus 4.35 million self-employed people. But if the future of work in the UK seems certain to involve more WFH for some groups, it follows that inequalities in housing are as relevant to the discussion as those between jobs and earnings.

The contrast between the recent experiences of those with a home office or spare room and those joining meetings from their bedrooms has been widely noted. Like enforced home schooling, WFH means different things to different people. Digital access and energy costs as well as physical space must be factored into any policy.

But there is also a danger that deeper divisions are reinforced by a shift that turns millions more flats and houses into workplaces. The bottom rungs of the so-called property ladder have already been hiked way beyond the reach of a growing number of people trapped in privately rented accommodation. A policy that further cements the importance of property ownership – because people are working in homes as well as living in them – could easily turn out to boost the interests of owner-occupiers and landlords at the expense of the UK's estimated 13 million private renters, who are already at a disadvantage due to their lack of assets and housing security.

Proof of widening housing and wealth inequality caused by the pandemic already exists. Price inflation over the past year was driven by owners using savings to get hold of more space, as well as the chancellor's decision to give buyers a stamp duty holiday (£180bn is estimated to have been added to household savings, with home workers in better paid and professional jobs the least likely to have been laid off or furloughed). Prices of detached homes rose 10% – twice as much as flats – with rural areas seeing the highest rises.

Some evidence suggests that lower housing costs in cities could be the beneficial result for renters. A new help-to-buy scheme and mortgage guarantees are meant to help the less well off. But researchers have warned of increasing polarisation between neighbourhoods. That's because, while

businesses providing services such as food and hairdressing in areas with higher concentrations of home workers can expect to flourish, equivalent businesses in places where mostly poorer people still go to work will suffer along with city centres.

The peak of amateur property development as a cultural phenomenon may have passed. The TV shows became repetitive and boring. But already there are hints that WFH is driving a new wave of home improvements. Building garden offices or retro-fitting may improve people's lives, or even contribute to the common good by reducing emissions.

[Revealed: rise in stress among those working from home](#)

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But it is disingenuous to talk about WFH without acknowledging the extent to which homeowners' economic interests are tied up with property. At a time when asset ownership (not just property but pensions and other investments) is radically [changing understandings of class](#), as Christine Berry and others have argued, "homes" are where owners' cash is, as well as their hearts. That doesn't mean that owner-occupiers like me think about property prices when we wake up in the morning. But if more homes are to become workplaces, it is more urgent than ever to address the current grossly unequal distribution of housing (recent research suggests the UK now has [2.7m buy-to-let landlords](#)).

Wealth is not the only dividing line in our society. Just 3.9% of deaths result in inheritance tax (up to £325,000 is exempt); passing more wealth than that down the generations remains the preserve of a small minority. The UK is [one of the most income-unequal countries](#) in the western world and the rise of zero-hours contracts, coupled with benefit cuts, means that for many people housing and income insecurity go together. Black, minority ethnic and female workers are disproportionately affected.

There is no telling yet what long-term effect working from home might have on incomes. But while there are undoubtedly upsides, the property market data so far does not suggest the overall impact will be progressive. Rather, they point to the likelihood of further asset inflation and a worsening of the UK's already chronic property addiction.

More secure and longer tenancies, and a huge increase in the supply of social housing, were desperately needed before; the signs are that ever greater numbers working from home will only intensify that need.

- Susanna Rustin is a Guardian leader writer
-

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Plans to ‘fix the broken asylum system’ won’t help the shocking backlog of cases

[Enver Solomon](#)

Asylum seekers are being pushed into crisis, with thousands forced to wait years before they learn their fate



Napier Barracks in Folkestone: ‘While waiting for their claims to be processed, most people seeking asylum are accommodated in a system never designed to be used over long periods of time.’ Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty

Napier Barracks in Folkestone: ‘While waiting for their claims to be processed, most people seeking asylum are accommodated in a system never designed to be used over long periods of time.’ Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty

Tue 6 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

Imagine being a teenager on the run from an abusive foster family in a war-ravaged country and having no choice but to put your life in the hands of

exploitative people smugglers to reach safety in the UK. That's what happened to 17-year-old Patricia*, whose life was shattered by the horrendous war in Liberia. When she was a baby, her family were forced to abandon her. The trauma she has endured is difficult to comprehend.

Since the British government first adopted the UN refugee convention 70 years ago, men, women and children like Patricia have been given safety in our country and support to rebuild their lives. But over the past decade the asylum system has become increasingly inefficient and beset by [chronic delays](#). Two years after Patricia applied for refugee protection, she is still awaiting news of her fate. Initially, officials said they would respond to her application as soon as possible, promising to review her case in 45 days. Many months later, Patricia has heard nothing. Her life has been put on hold, causing her huge distress, anxiety and pain. Without an asylum decision, Patricia cannot work or find a permanent home.

Hers is not an exceptional story, but rather the reality for tens of thousands of people who have fled war, terror and oppression to seek safety in the UK. More than 50,000 people [have been waiting](#) more than six months for an initial decision from the Home Office about their asylum claim.

The backlog of cases is symptomatic of a dysfunctional and under-resourced system. The government repeatedly states that it plans to "fix the broken asylum system" and today introduces a new nationality and borders bill in parliament. Yet the legislation and [wider reform plans](#) contain no specific measures to address this backlog. Instead, reforms are more likely to exacerbate the situation by introducing further delays to the decision-making process.

New rules mean that people seeking asylum who have come to the UK over land via irregular routes will have to wait six months before their application can be processed while attempts are made to return them to the so-called safe countries they travelled through. At present, there are no bilateral removal agreements in place with other countries, so the only outcome is to add six months to the asylum process, increasing the waiting time for individuals and the huge backlog that the system already faces.

New analysis by the Refugee Council shows that the number of people waiting for more than a year for a decision increased almost tenfold in the past decade, from 3,588 people in 2010 to 33,016 in 2020. At the end of last year, 2,284 people had been waiting three years or more for an initial decision; of these individuals, 253 had been waiting for over five years.

Living in limbo and not knowing when your asylum case will be decided has a devastating impact on mental health and wellbeing. While waiting for their claims to be processed, most people seeking asylum live on just over £5 a day. They're not permitted to work, and are accommodated and supported in a system that was never designed to be used over long periods of time. This hostile environment appears designed to push people into crisis, forcing people to become increasingly unstable as months and years of uncertainty and poverty erode their mental and physical health. Unable to work, many asylum seekers lose the work-based skills they arrived with, damaging their integration and employment prospects for the future. In some cases, the sheer emotional weight of waiting can lead to self-harm and suicidal thoughts.

[Today marks the day in Britain that millions of neighbours become foreigners | Daniel Trilling](#)

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Aside from this devastating human impact, the backlog has also resulted in significant financial costs for the Home Office, which is responsible for accommodating and supporting people seeking asylum who have no other means to support themselves. The cost of the current backlog is estimated to be in the region of £220m a year.

Instead of slamming the door on people who are in desperate need of safety, the government should reform the asylum process to ensure it's both fair and efficient. The most obvious way to clear the backlog would be introducing effective triaging and prioritisation, publishing an action plan to address the delays and establishing a dedicated backlog clearance team. Allowing people to work while they wait for their claim to be processed is vital; so is ensuring people have a fair hearing regardless of how they reach our shores.

Vulnerable people should not be left waiting for years to hear news of their fate. Not only is this unjust, it is inefficient and ineffective. If the government is serious about addressing the issues that have created this backlog and giving asylum seekers the opportunity to rebuild their lives and integrate in the UK, it needs to radically rethink Britain's asylum system. Competence, compassion and control are needed instead of cruelty, cold-heartedness and ineptitude.

- Enver Solomon is chief executive of the Refugee Council

*Patricia's name has been changed to protect her identity

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OpinionRelationships

No one believes my husband is my husband. Is that because he's younger and prettier than me?

Zoe Williams



He's not my brother. He's not my colleague. If he was, we wouldn't have such ridiculous conversations



Look – we’re a couple! Photograph: Pål Hansen/The Guardian

Look – we’re a couple! Photograph: Pål Hansen/The Guardian

Tue 6 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Out and about with Mr Z, nobody ever thinks we’re married. I have always had a sense that this was true, but never any proof until I went in to the butcher’s on my own and she said: “Is Will your brother?” Normally, we’d have been there together. I want to say lockdown turned stocking up on meat into a day trip, but that was true even before Covid. We’d treat it like a fairground: “Ooh, pasties! I love a pasty.” “Could we get black pudding past the kids?” and on and on, all the way through the major carnivorous avenues. What brother and sister do that?

“It’s because I’m older than you,” I said to Mr Z. He said: “No, it’s probably because I’m out of your league.” How we laughed.

The next time it was a car-hire place, where we were acting about as married as two people can be. I was trying to hold 17 things in one hand and drink a double espresso in the other; he was suggesting that maybe some kind of receptacle – a bag? – would help and I was spilling espresso and blaming him for distracting me with his “helpfulness”. For God’s sake, should we

have been saying “I do” right there in the foyer? “If I could just get the licence details from your colleague,” said the guy.

“It’s because you don’t look at me in a loving way,” I decided. Mr Z said: “It might be because we have different surnames,” and I said: “Whose fault is that?” and he said: “Still yours.”

Last night, we were auditioning a pub as our tertiary local (we already have a main and a reserve). I was against it because it had only hipster lager, no session lager, and he was for it because it had Verdant’s Roy, I Want a Hilux pale ale, then we discussed the aesthetics of the Hilux pick-up truck. Again, how much more married can two people be? “Do you want to split this?” said the barman. “We’re married!” I exploded. “What married couple splits the bill on two pints?”

The pub later passed the audition with its chicken wings; we may not have passed its “regulars” test with flying colours.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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Tigray forces mobilise against militias from neighbouring province

Fighters prepare to face paramilitaries from Amhara following withdrawal of federal troops from region



A soldier of Tigray Defence Force greets a man as soldiers are welcomed by people on a street in Mekelle. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

A soldier of Tigray Defence Force greets a man as soldiers are welcomed by people on a street in Mekelle. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

[Jason Burke](#) Africa correspondent

Tue 6 Jul 2021 00.00 EDT

Insurgent forces in Tigray are mobilising for new conflict against militia from a neighbouring province in [Ethiopia](#), with thousands of new volunteers joining their ranks after federal forces withdrew following more than eight months of war.

Ethiopian federal forces declared a unilateral ceasefire and pulled out of Mekelle, the capital of Tigray province, as well as dozens of other towns eight days ago.

Witnesses in Aksum and other cities in Tigray told the Guardian they have seen long convoys of troops loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) heading westwards, apparently redeploying to positions facing militia from neighbouring Amhara province.

01:02

Footage shows Tigray forces mobilising in Aksum – video

The TPLF moved into Mekelle, a stronghold of the party, shortly after federal forces withdrew. At the weekend, the party, which dominated Ethiopian politics for decades before being sidelined since the [prime minister, Abiy Ahmed](#), took power in 2018, paraded thousands of [captured Ethiopian troops](#) through the city.

Recruiting offices across Tigray are crowded as many young men who had hidden from federal forces and their allies from the neighbouring country of Eritrea return to towns now once more under the control of the TPLF, multiple witnesses told the Guardian. Trucks full of new recruits have also been seen in towns in central Tigray.

On Monday, Abiy sought to explain the withdrawal from Tigray, which came eight months after federal forces were sent into the province to oust the TPLF from power following rising tensions and attacks on national military bases, to parliament.

The 44-year-old leader [described the ceasefire as a “moment of reflection”](#).

“The value we place on peace is priceless. It’s the basis for our national prosperity,” said Abiy, who won the Nobel peace prize in 2019 after

concluding an agreement with Eritrea that ended a decades-long war.

In a speech, Abiy blamed the TPLF for the conflict, saying the “terrorist TPLF mobilised the people of Tigray for war” and had paid “elements” throughout Ethiopia to destabilise the country.

The “law enforcement operation” in Tigray had been a success, [Abiy said](#), as federal government had “taken back weaponry seized illegally”, thwarted efforts to divide Ethiopian society and “apprehended key leadership of the criminal clique”. Now officials had decided there “should be a period of silence for everyone to think”.

The uncompromising language will dismay international observers, who hope that the ceasefire in Tigray will lead to some kind of political settlement, though many fear renewed fighting.

The government in Addis Ababa has always refused to open any dialogue with the TPLF leaders, classifying the group as a terrorist organisation by parliamentary decree.

Abiy also said the Ethiopian government could mobilise huge numbers of forces, including half a million militia troops or a million youths who could be trained.

The most likely flashpoint for new hostilities is along the new frontline between Tigrayan forces and the paramilitaries from Amhara who fought alongside regular federal forces from last November. The Amharan militia have been accused of systematic ethnic cleansing in the west of Tigray and remain in possession of a swath of western Tigray, which TPLF officials want to reclaim.

In Aksum, where there was heavy fighting and a massacre of hundreds blamed on Eritrean troops, dozens of trucks drove through the centre of the town on Saturday carrying hundreds new recruits and more experienced fighters. Onlookers cheered the convoy.

Humanitarian workers based in the area described to the Guardian a surge in recruitment and military traffic on roads.

“Suddenly there is a lot of movement. There are the trucks full of soldiers and recruits, then there are a lot of people moving around, trying to get home, looking for lost relatives, trying to find food. Before they were simply too frightened,” said one, who requested anonymity.

There are also reports of young men leaving camps for those displaced from Tigray to join the Tigray Defence Forces, as troops loyal to the TPLF are now known.

“We’ve multiple reports of young men coming back down from hills, or from remote farms and joining up,” said one humanitarian official in Mekelle.

At the weekend the TPLF said it would accept “a ceasefire in principle” but posed strict conditions for it to be formalised, including the withdrawal from the region of all forces from both Amhara and Eritrea.

The United Nations and numerous governments have called for a ceasefire to be respected, especially to allow humanitarian aid to reach civilian populations. Millions in Tigray are threatened with famine, or already faced by critical and life-threatening shortages.

The rebel authorities are also calling for procedures to hold Ahmed and the president, Isaias Afwerki, to account for “the damage they have caused”, as well as the creation by the UN of an independent investigation body to probe the “horrific crimes” carried out during the conflict.

Thousands of civilians have died in massacres, [most committed by Eritrean and Ethiopian forces](#).

Other conditions are humanitarian, including the distribution of aid and the safe return to Tigray of displaced people.

There has been dismay at the actions of Ethiopian forces as they withdrew and the government, which have included cutting electricity supply and communications, suspending flights as well as destroying two bridges important for the delivery of aid. Banks are also shut in the province, leading to an acute shortage of cash.

Some analysts have spoken of a blockade. Residents in Mekelle said fuel is running short, there is limited food in the city and clean water is hard to find as power outages mean pumps and filters are not working.

Ethiopia held a general election last month in which Abiy's Prosperity party is expected to do well.

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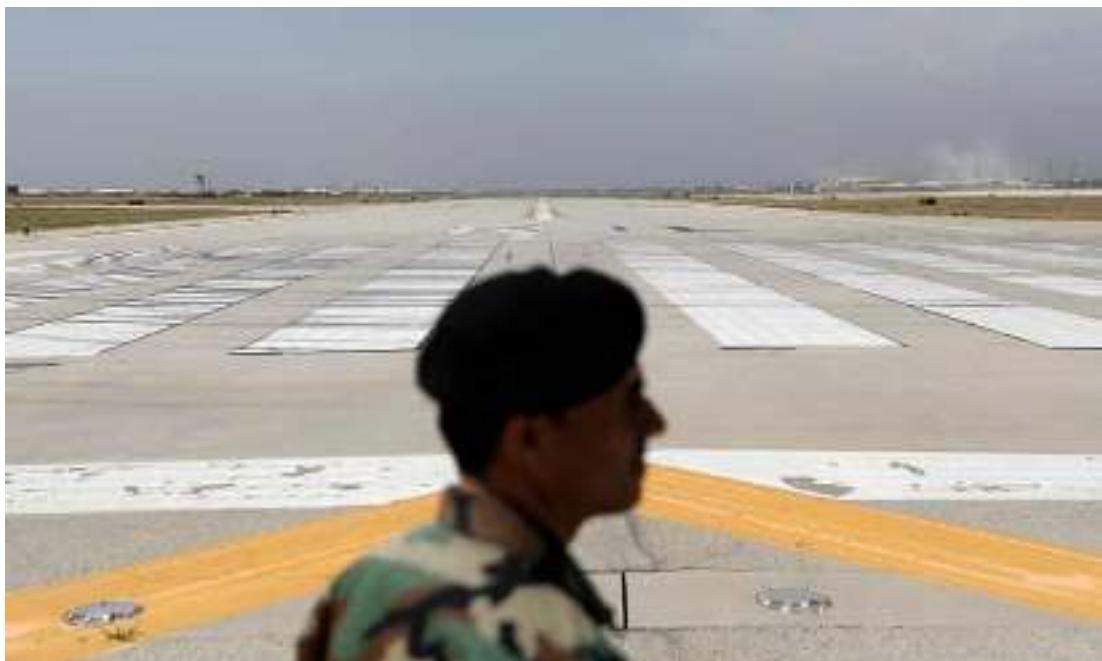
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Afghan anger over US's sudden, silent Bagram departure

Military officials say troops turned off power and slipped away without notifying new commander



An Afghan soldier by the runway at the huge Bagram airbase following the departure of US troops. Photograph: Mohammad Ismail/Reuters

An Afghan soldier by the runway at the huge Bagram airbase following the departure of US troops. Photograph: Mohammad Ismail/Reuters

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

Tue 6 Jul 2021 08.08 EDT

US forces plunged their main operating base in [Afghanistan](#) into darkness and abandoned it to looters when they slipped away in the middle of the night after two decades at the site without notifying their Afghan allies.

The furtive departure from Bagram airbase, which is vital to the security of Kabul and holds about 5,000 mostly Taliban prisoners, infuriated the Afghans. Many saw it as emblematic of a withdrawal they say is being carried out entirely to fit an American political schedule, with no heed for the collapsing security situation on the ground.

“People are saying: ‘The Americans didn’t ask Afghans about coming here, and they didn’t consult Afghans about leaving’,” said one senior official.

Much of northern Afghanistan, once an anti-Taliban stronghold, has fallen to the group in the last two weeks, and the militants have made substantial advances across the rest of the country. Afghanistan has just over 400 districts, and the Taliban now hold nearly half, and are fighting for many more.

The new commander of Bagram airbase, Gen Mir Asadullah Kohistani, only discovered the Americans’ had gone several hours after their 3am departure.



‘We heard some rumour that the Americans had left,’ said the new Bagram commander, Gen Mir Asadullah Kohistani. Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

“We did not know of their timeline for departure. They did not tell us when they left,” the commander said during a tour of the evacuated and now-looted base.

“We [heard] some rumour that the Americans had left Bagram … and finally by 7am we understood that it was confirmed,” Kohistani told the Associated Press.

They had turned off the electricity on the way out, and the sudden darkness served as a signal to the looters, said Abdul Raouf, a soldier of 10 years who has also served in Taliban strongholds of Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

The looters entered from the north, smashing through the first barrier, ransacking buildings, loading anything that was not nailed down into trucks, he told the AP. Another soldier said the US forces’ stealthy departure had thrown away 20 years of goodwill.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Tuesday that the exact moment of the departure “was not divulged for operational security purposes. In general we felt it was better to keep that information as closely held as possible.”

He added: “It’s not a statement about whether we trust or don’t trust our Afghan partners.”

Map

There was already widespread anger in Afghanistan about comments by US President Joe Biden over the weekend, when he shrugged off questions about the end of the US presence in Afghanistan by saying he wanted to talk about “happy things” over the Fourth of July holiday instead.

Both US and UK troops had been expected to end their missions in the country at the weekend, bar a handful of American forces staying on to guard the embassy in Kabul.

But as district after district fell to the Taliban, Washington appeared to have an abrupt change of heart about the optics of finalising a withdrawal – and one that increasingly looks like a defeat to the resurgent Taliban – on one of the country’s most important holidays.

Biden’s spokesperson, Jen Psaki, has since said that the withdrawal is likely to be completed in August. The UK followed the American lead, blaming

“mixed messaging” for briefings that it would also bring the final regular troops home on 4 July.

Both countries are reportedly considering keeping special forces troops in the country to support the fight against the Taliban and Isis.



A member of the Afghan security forces walks in the sprawling Bagram airbase. Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

But with Bagram and its two runways no longer in American hands, the main US mission in Afghanistan is in effect over already. The Pentagon said in a statement on Tuesday that the withdrawal was more than 90% completed.

The new details of last week’s secretive withdrawal under cover of darkness came as Afghan authorities deployed hundreds of commandos and pro-government militias on Tuesday to counter the Taliban’s blistering offensive in the north, a day after more than 1,000 government troops fled into neighbouring Tajikistan.

The government has sent reinforcements including special forces to provincial capitals now effectively besieged by the Taliban, and vowed to fight back.

But the scale of collapse has left many people, even in the still relatively secure capital, questioning how long the government can hold out, and fearful of what further Taliban advances will mean for them and their families.



An Afghan soldier at the Bagram airbase following the US withdrawal.
Photograph: Hedayatullah Amid/EPA

Vast queues outside the passport office every morning, mostly of people looking to flee abroad, are testament to rising fear.

With 3,000 troops under his command, Kohistani's forces at Bagram are far smaller than the [US military](#) presence at the base during its heyday when Bagram resembled a small, if heavily militarised, town with its coffee shops, sports facilities, fast food chains and even a cinema.

It was the gateway to the Afghan war for tens of thousands of American troops, and for some all they ever saw of the country.



Some of the vehicles left behind at Bagram. Photograph: Hedayatullah Amid/EPA

Kohistani said the US left behind 3.5m objects, all itemised by the departing military. They include tens of thousands of water bottles, energy drinks and military ready-made meals.

They also include thousands of civilian vehicles, many of them without keys to start them, and hundreds of armoured vehicles. Kohistani said the US also left behind small weapons and the ammunition for them, but the departing troops took away heavy weapons and destroyed ammunition for those weapons.

On Monday, three days after the US departure, Afghan soldiers were still collecting piles of rubbish that included empty water bottles, cans and empty energy drinks left behind by the looters.

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Israeli PM suffers setback in vote on Arab citizenship rights law

Parliament fails to renew law barring Arab citizens from extending citizenship rights to spouses



The Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, suffered a stinging defeat in a vote he reportedly described as a referendum on his new coalition government. Photograph: Ronen Zvulun/Reuters

The Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, suffered a stinging defeat in a vote he reportedly described as a referendum on his new coalition government. Photograph: Ronen Zvulun/Reuters

[Bethan McKernan](#) and agencies

Tue 6 Jul 2021 05.57 EDT

The Israeli parliament has voted down an extension to controversial legislation that bars Arab Israelis from extending residency or citizenship rights to Palestinian spouses, in an early blow to the country's [new coalition government](#).

After a marathon all-night voting session that ended on Tuesday morning, the Knesset decided not to renew the law in a 59-59 vote. The outcome is widely seen as a stinging defeat for the prime minister, [Naftali Bennett](#), who failed to unite the coalition's disparate ideological wings in what he reportedly himself referred to as a "referendum" on the new government.

The vote means the law will expire at midnight and could trigger as many as 15,000 citizenship applications from people living in the West Bank and Gaza – a development the legislation's supporters say poses security issues and threatens Israel's Jewish character.

The interior minister, Ayalet Shaked, tweeted after the vote that watching members of Likud, former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's centre-right party, celebrate the vote's outcome, alongside the Religious Zionism party and the Arab Joint List, was "madness" and a "great victory for post-Zionism".

The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, which human rights groups say is racist and prevents thousands of families from reuniting or living together, was introduced as temporary emergency legislation during the peak of the second intifada in 2003 in an attempt to quell terrorist attacks inside Israel.

Under the legislation, Arab citizens, who comprise a fifth of Israel's population, have had few if any avenues for bringing spouses from the West Bank and [Gaza](#) into the country. The law also applies to Jewish Israelis who marry Palestinians from the territories, although such unions are extremely rare.

The law has been renewed annually since it was introduced. Leftwing elements of the new government were unwilling to back it this time around, however, and Netanyahu and his allies in opposition saw the impasse as an opportunity to harm the coalition.

“With all due respect for this law, the importance of toppling the government is greater,” Netanyahu said Monday. “This isn’t just a law. It’s a law that exposes the fault-line in this government, whose purpose is to advance an anti-Zionist agenda.”

Israel’s three-week-old government was formed after the hardline Yamina party’s Bennett and his centrist partner, Yair Lapid, managed to bring together parties across the political spectrum, including an Arab party, with one shared goal: ousting Netanyahu from a 12-year stint in office.

An agreement to focus on areas of common ground in governance has quickly come unstuck, as both the citizenship law and disagreements on an evacuation deal for the [illegal West Bank settlement Evyatar](#) has shown.

Bennett proposed a compromise on the citizenship law with liberal members of the coalition that would have extended the legislation by six months while offering residency rights to 1,600 Arab families – a fraction of those affected. But the measure was defeated, in part because two Arab members of the coalition abstained.

The outcome, however, gave some hope to Arab families that have been affected by the law.

“You want your security, it’s no problem, you can check each case by itself,” said Taiseer Khatib, an Arab citizen of Israel whose wife of more than 15 years, from the West Bank city of Jenin, must regularly apply for permits to live with him and their three children in Israel.

“There’s no need for this collective punishment just because you are Palestinian,” he said during a protest outside the Knesset on Monday before the vote.

Male spouses over the age of 35 and female spouses over 25, as well as some humanitarian cases, can currently apply for the equivalent of a tourist permit, which must be renewed regularly. The holders of such permits are ineligible for drivers’ licences, public health insurance and most forms of employment.

Palestinian spouses from Gaza have been completely banned since the militant Hamas group seized power there in 2007. Palestinians who are unable to get permits but try to live with their spouses inside Israel are at risk of deportation.

Israel's Arab minority has close familial ties to Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza strip and largely identifies with their cause, viewing the law as one of several forms of discrimination they face in a country that legally defines itself as a Jewish nation-state.

Associated Press contributed to this report

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Rest room: tiny Vancouver ‘micro studio’ combines bedroom and toilet

Just a few footsteps separate bed and bathroom in an unusual rental that appeared on Craigslist



The tiny apartment in Vancouver was listed for rent at C\$680 a month.
Photograph: Internet Archive Wayback Machine

The tiny apartment in Vancouver was listed for rent at C\$680 a month.
Photograph: Internet Archive Wayback Machine

Helen Sullivan

@helenrsullivan

Tue 6 Jul 2021 01.24 EDT

Being single can be tough. But should you be so despondent about your lack of a partner that you can barely make it from the bed to the bathroom, one

Vancouver apartment might be the answer.

An ad for a “micro studio” posted on Craigslist this month described the apartment – which includes new flooring, a window and a single bed, but does not include a kitchen – as “ideal for a single individual looking to live downtown at an affordable rate, and who does not need much space”.

The 160-square-foot (15 sq metre) apartment’s layout means there is little differentiation between the toilet and the bedroom – they are a few steps apart, and in direct line of sight, without a door. All this for just C\$680 (US\$550) a month, hot water and electricity included.

Pets are not allowed.

[Room with a poo: the tiny Sydney apartment for rent with a toilet in the kitchen](#)

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Vancouver is the seventh most expensive housing market in the world, according to a 2020 [survey](#) by commercial real estate firm CBRE, ahead of Los Angeles, Paris and New York. This year, a [study](#) by the Urban Reform Institute named Vancouver the second most unaffordable city of 100 major metropolises, behind Hong Kong and just ahead of Sydney. The coronavirus pandemic meant Vancouver housing prices rose by 20-25% in a year, the [Vancouver Sun reports](#).

Still, the micro apartment’s rent is more than half the city’s average of C\$1,107 (US\$900).

The listing was removed after a few days, but not before being [picked up](#) by the website Vancouver is Awesome, which points out the apartment’s size is smaller than the City of Vancouver’s 250-square-foot (23 sq metre) definition of a micro dwelling.

The city’s guidelines are also particular about bathrooms, indicating they should be “physically separated from the remainder of the unit by partitions and a door to ensure privacy and to isolate noise and odours”.

Last year, a Sydney apartment was ridiculed for its similarly open-minded approach. The bathroom of the US\$1,200 a month unit featured a toilet and shower located in the kitchen. But at least they were separated by glass.

Then again, too much space can be a bad thing. In March this year, a New York woman [discovered an entire three-bedroom apartment](#) behind her mirror after trying to determine the source of a mysterious draft in her bathroom.

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Hong Kong

Google, Facebook and other tech companies threaten to quit Hong Kong over privacy law

Asia Internet Coalition, including Twitter and Apple, sounds warning over amendments to laws that could see individuals hit with ‘severe sanctions’



Tech companies including Google, Facebook and Twitter could stop offering services in Hong Kong over data laws Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

Tech companies including Google, Facebook and Twitter could stop offering services in Hong Kong over data laws Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

Helen Davidson in Taipei

@heldavidson

Tue 6 Jul 2021 08.04 EDT

Tech giants including Google, Facebook, and Twitter could stop offering services to [Hong Kong](#) if the city moves forward with laws to impose penalties on users who publicly release identifying information about individual or organisations, an Asian industry group has warned.

The Asia Internet Coalition, which counts the three major companies as well as [Apple](#) Inc and LinkedIn as members, wrote to Hong Kong's Privacy Commissioner to warn that privacy laws which could see undefined "severe sanctions" against individuals for so-called doxing were "not aligned with global norms and trends".

"The only way to avoid these sanctions for technology companies would be to refrain from investing and offering their services in Hong Kong, thereby depriving Hong Kong businesses and consumers, whilst also creating new barriers to trade," the letter said.

Hong Kong saw an [unprecedented wave of doxing](#) – the malicious spread of private information online – during the mass pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in 2019. Personal details were released by parties on both sides, with police, politicians, journalists and activists targeted, as well as their families.

[Big tech firms may be handing Hong Kong user data to China](#)

[Read more](#)

Hong Kong's chief executive, Carrie Lam, said on Tuesday that the proposed law would target only "illegal" doxing, and said the privacy commissioner would be happy to meet tech companies if they had concerns.

"There is wide support that doxing should be legislated against," Lam said. "The amendment exercise is to address the issue of doxing. The privacy commissioner is empowered to take action and carry out investigation – that's it."

Lam said all new legislation attracted concern but claimed fears expressed about the impact of the national security law had not been shown not to eventuate. The security law, introduced in 2020, has been widely and internationally condemned, but Hong Kong authorities maintain it has brought stability to the city.

Lam said that security law had been "slandered and defamed". "It's the same case for the privacy law," she concluded.

[The letter](#), signed by AIC managing director, Jeff Paine, said the language of the legislation would subject intermediaries and local subsidiaries to criminal investigations and prosecution for doxing offences, including for not removing material from platforms.

“[This] is a completely disproportionate and unnecessary response to doxing, given that intermediaries are neutral platforms with no editorial control over the doxing posts, and are not the persons publishing personal data,” it said.

“In reality, most intermediaries already have notice and takedown regimes in place to deal with doxing content and such requests would be responded to without undue delay.”

The letter, first reported by the Wall Street Journal, said the AIC agreed doxing was a serious concern, and it appreciated “the importance of privacy and the protection of personal information”. However, it also said any anti-doxing legislation “can have the effect of curtailing free expression, [and] must be built upon principles of necessity and proportionality”.

The letter outlined key concerns with the legislation, including its granting of regionally unprecedented police-level powers to a statutory agency, and a lack of a specific definition for acts of doxing.

“This gives rise to legitimate concerns that ‘doxing’ in the proposed amendments could have an overly broad interpretation such that even innocent acts of sharing of information online could be deemed unlawful,” it said, adding this could include legitimate acts such as media reporting.

[Hong Kong police say mourning officer’s attacker is like backing terrorism](#)
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Facebook did not immediately respond to a request for comment, while Twitter referred questions to the AIC. Google declined to comment.

A sweeping crackdown on opposition and dissent by Hong Kong authorities accelerated with the implementation of the Beijing-designed [national security law](#) last year. More than 10,000 people have been arrested in

relation to the protests, and at least 128, including journalists and politicians, in relation to new national security offences. The Hong Kong government has rejected international criticism of its crackdown, and instead vowed to further strengthen laws.

– Reuters contributed to this report

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