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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Sky Brown, 13, becomes Britain's youngest Olympic medallist with skateboard bronze

- Teenager makes history as Sakura Yosozumi claims gold
- Hiraki Kokona, aged 12, wins silver in Japanese one-two



Sky Brown won bronze for Team GB in the inaugural skateboard park final at Ariake Urban Sports Park in Tokyo. Photograph: Ezra Shaw/Getty Images

Sky Brown won bronze for Team GB in the inaugural skateboard park final at Ariake Urban Sports Park in Tokyo. Photograph: Ezra Shaw/Getty Images

PA Media

Wed 4 Aug 2021 00.40 EDT

Sky Brown has been crowned Great Britain's youngest Olympic medallist after claiming bronze in the women's skateboard park event at the Ariake Urban Arena in Tokyo.

After falling in her first two runs of the final, the 13-year-old nailed her last attempt with a score of 56.47 to finish behind the Japanese pair Sakura Yosozumi and Kokona Hiraki. Aged just 12, Hiraki duly eclipsed Brown to become the youngest Olympic medallist in 85 years. The favourite, Misugu Okamoto, fell on her final run and missed out on the podium.

[Alice Dearing makes history but Team GB's first female black swimmer leaves 'broken'](#)

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Brown's achievement is all the more remarkable for the fractured skull and broken bones she suffered during an horrific fall in training last year. Brown posted a video clip of the fall on her Instagram account, which has approaching one million followers, along with the message: "I'm excited to come back even stronger and even tougher. My heart wants to go so hard right now."

Brown, who was born in Miyazaki, Japan, to a Japanese mother and British father, competed at the US Open in 2016 at the age of eight and first elected to compete for Great Britain in 2018. She arrived with plenty of profile, having won the US version of Dancing With The Stars: Juniors in 2018, and expressed her ambition to achieve the almost unprecedented feat of competing in two sports – skateboarding and surfing – at the Games, something from which she was subsequently dissuaded.

In 2019, Brown finished third at the World [Skateboarding](#) Championship, and the following year she effectively secured her Olympic qualification by picking up a bronze medal at the Park World Championships in São Paulo, Brazil.

Last month, she warmed up for the Games by winning gold in the prestigious X Games, although neither of her key Olympic challengers, Okamoto and Hiraki, were present.



Sky Brown in action on her way to bronze. Photograph: Adam Davy/PA

Hiraki was first up of the major contenders in qualifying amid the hottest day of the Games so far, with the temperature tipping 32 degrees with 90% humidity. The 12-year-old's best score from three runs, 52.46, was comfortably surpassed twice by Brown, with the Briton recording a best of 57.40 before Okamoto, the 15-year-old reigning world champion, laid down her mark with a leading 58.51.

Another Japanese skater, Yosozumi, raised the level in the final with a first run of 60.09, which would ultimately prove enough to give her the gold medal, while 12-year-old Hiraki posted an imposing 59.04.

Sign up for our Tokyo 2020 briefing with all the news, views and previews for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Brown and Okamoto struggled with a trick known as the kick flip indy, leaving both facing the prospect of having to go clean on their respective final routines to reach the podium.

Brown stepped up when it mattered, her third score nudging her to bronze before another fall by Okamoto confirmed the Briton's historic medal.

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Tokyo 2020 Olympics: GB sailing gold, world record for Sydney McLaughlin and more – live!

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Hannah Mills and Eilidh McIntyre win Team GB's third Olympic sailing gold

- Mills becomes most successful female Olympic sailor in history
- Mills defends women's 470 title won at Rio 2016
- GB sailors finish Games with three golds, a silver and bronze



Hannah Mills and Eilidh McIntyre celebrate winning Team GB's final sailing gold at Tokyo 2020. Photograph: Carlos Barría/Reuters

Hannah Mills and Eilidh McIntyre celebrate winning Team GB's final sailing gold at Tokyo 2020. Photograph: Carlos Barría/Reuters

[Suzanne Wrack at Enoshima Yacht Harbour](#)

[@SuzyWrack](#)

Wed 4 Aug 2021 03.25 EDT

Hannah Mills became the most successful female Olympic sailor of all time after the reigning champion and Eilidh McIntyre clinched the final sailing gold of the Tokyo Games in the women's 470.

[The greatest race ever part II: Sydney McLaughlin wins 400m hurdles gold in world record time](#)

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The 33-year-old Mills had said that she and McIntyre, whose father Mike won gold in Seoul in 1988 in the Star class, were “feeling sick with nerves” as the final race approached. They quickly fell in behind race leaders Switzerland and remained second going into the final leg. They dropped

down to fifth after rounding the final buoy but had done enough to extend their lead at the top to 16 points.

Mills and McIntyre secured seven top-three finishes in their 10 races prior to the double point medal race to give themselves a healthy 14-point lead over French duo Camille Lecointre and Aloise Retornaz.

Mills, who was a flag-bearer for Team GB during the opening ceremony alongside rower Mohamed Sbihi, won a silver medal in London 2012 and then gold in Rio in 2016 before then partner Saskia Clarke retired from Olympic racing.

She and the 27-year-old McIntyre began sailing as a pair in 2017 and won the World Cup Series in Spain's Santander in their first race together.

The gold puts Team GB clear of Australia at the top of the sailing medal table with three golds, one silver and one bronze and is their second most successful sailing medal haul behind Beijing 2008 where they secured four golds, one silver and one bronze.

Luke Patience and Chris Grube finished fifth in the men's 470 after a disappointing eighth-place finish in the double-point medal race.

Australian duo Mathew Belcher and Will Ryan picked up a fourth first-place finish to win gold, having gone into the medal race with an almost unassailable 20 point lead. Sweden clinched silver with a second-place finish and Spain crossed the line in fifth to secure bronze.

Patience and Grube, who won bronze together at the Junior World Championships in 2006 before going their separate ways only to unite shortly before the Rio Games, went into the medal race in fifth. They were nine points behind the bronze medal position with faint hopes of climbing into contention but slipped behind the leading six in the fleet early on and could not close the gap and were pipped to seventh by Italy.

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[Belarus](#)

Belarus sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya leaves Tokyo on flight to Vienna

Athlete is expected to head to Poland later after seeking protection at its embassy amid fears she would be punished if she returned home



Belarus athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya waves goodbye as she boards her Vienna-bound flight at Narita airport outside Tokyo on Wednesday.
Photograph: Charly Triballeau/AFP/Getty Images

Belarus athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya waves goodbye as she boards her Vienna-bound flight at Narita airport outside Tokyo on Wednesday.
Photograph: Charly Triballeau/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Tue 3 Aug 2021 22.57 EDT

Belarusian sprinter Krystsina Tsimanouskaya has left Japan on a Vienna-bound plane after she [refused to fly home](#) earlier this week.

The 24-year-old, who had sought refuge at the Polish embassy in Tokyo, had been expected to take a flight direct to Warsaw but switched at the last minute, an airport official told reporters.

Tsimanouskaya was in the care of Poland's diplomatic services, Polish deputy foreign minister Marcin Przydacz said. "As we have indicated many times, for safety reasons we do not provide details of the flight route."

Tsimanouskaya said in an interview with the Associated Press that officials from her team had "made it clear" she would face punishment if she

returned home to an autocratic government that has relentlessly stifled any criticism.

Her refusal to leave for Belarus on Sunday, after she said she was taken by her team to the airport against her wishes, caused high drama at the Games. She [sought protection at the Polish embassy](#) on Monday. Poland has offered her a humanitarian visa.

Masked and wearing blue jeans, a blue blouse and sunglasses, Tsimanouskaya arrived in a police-escorted van at Narita airport east of the Japanese capital. She did not speak to several dozen waiting reporters, disappearing into an elevator to a VIP area, escorted by several officials rolling her suitcases.

[Belarus sprinter faces long exile in Poland after seeking refuge](#)
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Tsimanouskaya was to board LOT Polish Airlines flight 80 bound for Warsaw, which was scheduled to depart Narita at 10.20am (0120 GMT), according to people familiar with the situation.

The International Olympic Committee said on Tuesday it had launched a formal investigation into the case and was expecting a report from the Belarusian team.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken has accused Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko's regime of intolerable "transnational repression" in the matter.

Tsimanouskaya, 24, had been due to compete in the women's 200-metre heats on Monday but said the Belarusian head coach had turned up at her room on Sunday at the athletes' village and told her she had to leave after she had criticised team officials.

"I will not return to Belarus," she told Reuters at the time.

The incident has focused attention on Belarus, where police have cracked down on dissent following a wave of protests triggered by an election last

year which the opposition says was rigged to keep Lukashenko in power.

Belarusian authorities have characterised anti-government protesters as criminals or violent revolutionaries backed by the West, and described the actions of their own law enforcement agencies as appropriate and necessary.

Vitaly Shishov, a Belarusian activist living in exile in Ukraine, [was found dead in a park](#) near his home in Kyiv early on Tuesday, and Ukrainian police launched a murder investigation. He led an organisation that helps Belarusians fleeing persecution.

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Students

Students apply to UK version of Erasmus foreign study scheme

More than 40,000 students could be offered places in new Turing scheme – though costs may not be fully covered



The Department for Education says 120 UK universities and colleges have applied for a share of the £110m Turing scheme. Photograph: Reeldeal Images/Alamy

The Department for Education says 120 UK universities and colleges have applied for a share of the £110m Turing scheme. Photograph: Reeldeal Images/Alamy

Richard Adams Education editor

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

The government's replacement for the Europe-wide Erasmus student exchange scheme appears to have got off to a flying start – although experts warn that the final numbers of young people taking part are likely to be well below its initial expectations.

The Department for Education said that more than 40,000 young people “will be able to work and study abroad” later this year through the new Turing scheme, introduced by the government to compensate for the [UK’s withdrawal from the Erasmus scheme](#) last year.

According to the DfE’s estimates, 120 universities have applied for a share of the £110m scheme, alongside schools and further education colleges, to fund work and study placements. The 40,000 total is said to include 28,000 placements for university students in 2021-22, more than the 18,300 placements that took place under the Erasmus scheme in the 2018-19 academic year.

[Wales sets up its own Erasmus programme](#)

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Paul James Cardwell, a professor at City Law School, University of London, who has compared the Erasmus and Turing schemes, said: “All opportunities to study abroad are welcome, but we need to be clear about how many students will actually go abroad, which will probably be much lower than the numbers that have been bid for.”

“We also don’t know whether these placements have been arranged and confirmed and, crucially, how much funding will be allocated to each participant.”

The new scheme has a wider geographical scope than that of Erasmus, with the DfE saying that young people “will be funded to take up work and study placements” in 150 countries. However, many of the countries listed by the DfE have border entry restrictions because of the Covid pandemic that will continue to hamper participation for the coming next year.

[I was an early Erasmus scholar, and I grieve for what British students have lost | Julian Baggini](#)

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Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, said he was pleased that 48% of applicants are expected to be from disadvantaged backgrounds, as part of the

government's targeting of areas which had seen low uptake of the Erasmus programme or its successor, Erasmus+.

Under the Turing scheme, disadvantaged students will be eligible for funding to cover extra expenses such as visas and passports.

"The chance to work and learn in a country far from home is a once in a lifetime opportunity – which broadens minds, sharpens skills and improves outcomes. But until now it has been an opportunity disproportionately enjoyed by those from the most privileged backgrounds," Williamson said.

The 40,000 applications exceed the DfE's own estimates for Turing's first year. But university administrators said that part of the increase compared with Erasmus was the inclusion of existing exchanges that took place outside Erasmus, [such as language programmes](#).

Matt Western, the shadow universities minister, said: "The Conservatives' rhetoric on the Turing scheme does not match the reality. Ministers are claiming to be targeting disadvantaged students but their scheme provides no support to cover tuition fees, which will make accessing this incredible opportunity impossible for many students."

Cardwell said it was too soon to tell if Turing would be an adequate replacement for Erasmus. "Even if students are able to travel to the host country during the pandemic, if the individual funding does not cover the costs associated with travel, then the number of actual departures could be quite low," he said.

"For all destinations, the tuition fee costs – which were waived under Erasmus – would not be covered under Turing, and these can be extremely high. Many students going within Europe, for example those on language or dual degree programmes, would normally depart under Erasmus, so it will be interesting to compare the level of funding they actually receive."

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Schools

Lack of government Covid plan for English schools ‘unforgivable’, says report

Senior figures refused to consider likelihood of exam cancellations before second lockdown

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Pupils were unclear about how they were to be assessed up to March 2021 and beyond, the investigation claims. Photograph: John Birdsall/Alamy

Pupils were unclear about how they were to be assessed up to March 2021 and beyond, the investigation claims. Photograph: John Birdsall/Alamy

[Richard Adams](#) Education editor

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.01 EDT

The government's refusal to draw up contingency plans to protect schools and exams before a second lockdown was an "unforgivable" error that left teachers and parents in England to deal with chaos, according to a new investigation into the government's handling of the pandemic.

The report by the Institute for Government thinktank castigates No 10 and the [Department for Education](#) (DfE) for insisting schools in England would remain open and exams would go ahead this year, even as it became obvious a second wave of infections made a second lockdown inevitable.

"What followed was easily the most disruptive period in children's education since at least the start of the second world war ... When it came to education, U-turn was to follow U-turn. Well into March 2021, and indeed beyond, pupils taking GCSEs, A-levels and BTecs remained unclear about precisely how they were to be assessed. At times it felt as though the school system was in chaos," the report concluded.

The report claims that senior figures, from the prime minister down, opposed the creation of backup plans for assessing A-levels, GCSEs and other qualifications in the event of formal exams not being held, leaving them without options and forced to pass responsibility on to teachers.

Nicholas Timmins, the author of the report, said: "The biggest single failure has to be the refusal to make contingency plans over the summer and autumn of 2020, the biggest impact of which was the failure to have anything in place to handle the second cancellation of exams in 2021."

Timmins's report quotes civil servants and sources within No 10 and the DfE that "confirm not just the failure but the refusal to make contingency plans" for further exam cancellations. It quotes a No 10 source as saying that "the clear steer" officials received from the prime minister was not to make contingency plans.

[Parents angry at shifting government Covid messages, say school leaders](#)
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According to the same source, No 10's view was that "if you prepare for these things not happening, then the outcome is that they are far more likely

not to happen ... people will look for the easy way out and take it". The source claimed Boris Johnson's "default is to bluff. To talk up things to such an extent that they will happen through the force of his own personality."

Another civil servant told Timmins that "having a contingency plan if things go wrong is seen by some ministers as a negative thought. If you plan for the worst, you are probably going to get it. And we were working for a set of politicians who wanted to be clear that they were in charge, and that they knew what they were doing."

The report, entitled Schools and Coronavirus: the Government's Handling of Education During the Pandemic, concluded that "the most unforgivable aspect of what happened is not just the failure to make contingency plans in the summer of 2020 but the refusal to do so – when it was already obvious that fresh school closures might well be needed."

The report praises the DfE for its initial handling of the response during the first lockdown in March 2020, especially the decision to keep schools open to the children of key workers and those from disadvantaged backgrounds or in care. However, Timmins says that the education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#), "appears not to have been directly involved in any of the key meetings ahead of the original decision to close schools in March 2020".

[Recovery plan for pupils in England is 'feeble', former catch-up tsar says](#)
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A DfE spokesperson said: "Contrary to the claims in this report, contingency plans for restrictions on schools opening in the 2021-22 academic year were first published in August 2020, and contingency plans for qualifications in 2021 were first discussed with Ofqual in October 2020.

"We have acted swiftly at every turn to minimise the impact on children's education and wellbeing and help keep pupils in face-to-face education as much as possible."

Kate Green, the shadow education secretary, said: "Labour called for a contingency plan for exams way back in the autumn term. The Conservatives dismissed our calls, and those of teachers and leaders,

resulting in a second year of exams chaos for pupils. It is clear the responsibility for this lies not just with the failing education secretary but with the prime minister himself.”

According to Timmins, the government also sought to keep local authorities away from decision-making about school closures and openings, describing its “refusal to trust local authorities and a failure to engage effectively with them, and their directors of public health, in ways that might have allowed a more nuanced and better response”.

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Vaccines and immunisation

Covid jab could soon be recommended for 16- and 17-year-olds, Sturgeon says

Government sources confirm scientific committee is reviewing its recommendation over vaccinating young people across UK

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Scotland's first minister told MSPs she was 'hoping [the JCVI] will recommend going further on the vaccination of young people'. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

Scotland's first minister told MSPs she was 'hoping [the JCVI] will recommend going further on the vaccination of young people'. Photograph:

Andrew Milligan/PA

[Libby Brooks](#), [Rowena Mason](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)

Tue 3 Aug 2021 19.16 EDT

Children aged 16 and 17 across the UK could be given access to Covid vaccinations in the coming days, according to [Nicola Sturgeon](#), after it emerged that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) was reconsidering its advice for young people.

Just two weeks after the body recommended against routine vaccination of children, the Scottish first minister revealed that she “hoped” over-16s would get the go-ahead to receive it after all.

Two government sources confirmed that the JCVI was looking again at widening its recommendation for children over 12. Jabs for this age group are currently limited to those who are clinically vulnerable or live with someone at risk.

Anthony Harnden, a member of the committee, said: “JCVI is in the process of finalising updated advice on the offer of vaccination of children and young people.”

Ministers are believed to have been in favour of older children getting access to the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, but the JCVI said they should not routinely be available to children who do not have a specific risk factor.

One of the concerns that the scientists raised, linked to the Pfizer jab, was about inflammation around the heart, with the JCVI concluding that the benefits did not outweigh the risk to those who would be receiving the jabs.

The government is hoping the country is past the worst of the third wave, with daily new cases of Covid across the UK falling to 21,691 on Tuesday and hospital admissions dropping to 731. There were 138 deaths. However, concerns remain about the possibility of the rate of new cases rising again once schools go back in September, at the same time as many employers are expecting more workers to return to the office.

Older teenagers are currently one of the groups with the highest levels of Covid infections, so offering vaccinations to over-16s could potentially have a significant impact in dampening transmission.

New findings released from the React1 study show fully vaccinated people were three times less likely than unvaccinated people to test positive for Covid – around a 50 to 60% reduced risk, including asymptomatic infection. The data from Imperial College London and Ipsos MORI also suggested double vaccinated people are also less likely to pass on the virus to others.

The study's estimates are somewhat [lower than figures from Public Health England](#) that have suggested 79% protection against symptomatic infection for Delta after two jabs.

While the React estimates had a considerable amount of statistical uncertainty, Prof Paul Elliott, director of the REACT programme, and Chair in Epidemiology and Public Health Medicine, Imperial College London, said the difference – even when comparing effectiveness against symptomatic Covid – could in part be down to the populations involved, noting PHE's data is based on those who come forward for testing, rather than a random sample.

"[With a] random sample of people, they may have symptoms but they may not go and get a test," he said.

Prof Rowland Kao, a participant in the the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (Spi-M) and an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh, said: "Per capita, older teenagers currently have the highest risk of Covid-19 infection, and vaccinating 16- and 17-year-olds should reduce this.

"Current evidence also suggests that, even when vaccinated individuals get infected, they both are at lower risk of severe disease and their viral load drops more quickly than for unvaccinated individuals, with the likely consequence that they are less likely to infect others, though this is difficult to prove directly.

“Thus it is likely that vaccinating older teens will not only protect them, but also help protect others and dampen down any further waves of infection that may occur.

“This of course must be counter-balanced by the evidence for occasional side-effects of the vaccines themselves, for which there is some evidence that they occur with higher frequency in younger adults and older teens.

“While this risk is low, it is important that the evidence on which any decision that is made on further vaccination of older teens is made clear.”

Making a statement to the Scottish parliament on Tuesday afternoon, Sturgeon said she was “hoping” to get the updated advice from the JCVI “over the next day or so”.

During the subsequent question-and-answer session with MSPs, Sturgeon said: “The JCVI are our advisory body so they have to give us the advice they think is right and I respect that. I am hoping it will recommend going further on the vaccination of young people.

“I am particularly concerned if possible to get vaccinations to 16- and 17-year-olds, which is obviously important for those who will be, for example, going to college and university and mingling with older young people who are vaccinated. But we’ll see what that advice brings and we stand ready to implement that as quickly as possible.”

She later said she was hoping and “veering towards expecting” the committee to recommend further vaccination of people in the 12- to 18-year-olds age group, and in particular “hopeful that we will see some updated recommendations in relation, as a priority as a first part of this, for 16- and 17-year-olds”.

Children over 12 with certain health conditions and those who live with vulnerable people were added to the vaccine programme last month, but the JCVI said it could identify little benefit in doing so for all 12- to 17-year-olds, although [other countries including the US and Canada have taken the step.](#)

Sturgeon recently called for the committee to keep this under review, saying it was “extremely important that this is not ruled out here”.

Scotland’s chief medical officer wrote to the JCVI at that time asking for the benefit of vaccinating all 12- to 17-year-olds to be “kept under close and ongoing review”.

Boris Johnson is due to visit Scotland on Wednesday and Thursday, but has declined an offer from the first minister to meet to discuss the recovery from the pandemic.

In a letter to Sturgeon, the prime minister highlighted her recent meetings with the Cabinet Office minister, Michael Gove, and said he was looking forward to meeting soon, but made no reference to a date.

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Study finds long-term Covid symptoms rare in school-age children

Analysis of symptomatic children finds fewer than one in 20 experienced symptoms beyond four weeks



On average, symptoms lasted for five days in younger children (five to 11 years old) and seven days in schoolchildren 12 to 17 years old. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

On average, symptoms lasted for five days in younger children (five to 11 years old) and seven days in schoolchildren 12 to 17 years old. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

*Natalie Grover Science correspondent
@NatalieGrover*

Tue 3 Aug 2021 18.30 EDT

Fewer than one in 20 Covid-positive children who experience symptoms continue to be symptomatic beyond four weeks, a [new study](#) has found.

The analysis was based on data collected between September 2020 and February 2021, coinciding with the reopening of schools in the autumn and the peak of the winter wave of the virus in the UK. It included data on 1,734 children from five to 17 years old.

The study is one of the first to offer a detailed description of Covid illness in symptomatic school-age children, and suggests long-term symptoms are rare in this age group. On average, symptoms lasted for five days in younger children (five to 11 years old) and seven days in older children (12 to 17 years old). About 4.4% experienced symptoms for four weeks or more, while one in 50 (1.8%) had symptoms lasting more than two months.

The study, based on data reported through the Zoe smartphone app by parents and carers, indicated that the most common symptoms reported in children were headaches, tiredness, a sore throat and loss of smell. There were no reports of serious neurological symptoms such as fits or seizures, impaired concentration or attention, the authors said.

In comparison, data on adults emanating from the same app showed that about one in seven adults experienced Covid symptoms lasting four weeks, while one in 20 were ill for eight weeks or longer. Symptomatic Covid in UK children was also found to be shorter in duration (six days, compared with 11 days in adults).

The study also compared children who tested positive for Covid-19 with children with other illnesses, and found that children with Covid were more likely to be ill for longer than four weeks, but at the four-week mark children with other illnesses tended to experience more symptoms.

Given the analysis was based on data collected up to February 2021, it does not indicate how these findings translate for the Delta coronavirus variant, which only began dominating in the UK from May onwards.

Dr Michael Absoud, a senior study author and senior lecturer at King's College London, noted that existing data from Public Health England and NHS England suggests there is no evidence that Covid illness triggered by Delta in children is more severe than the previously dominant Alpha variant. "So ... we wouldn't expect the results to change," he said, adding that the latest data is now being analysed.

The results also support the recent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) [recommendation](#) that children over 12 in the UK will get a vaccine only if they are clinically extremely vulnerable or live with somebody at risk, he added.

Russell Viner, professor of adolescent health at UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health and a member of the government's Sage committee, said the data on prolonged Covid illness in children "is reassuring about the population burden of post-Covid symptoms in children and young people".

The most [recent figures](#) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), encompassing the four weeks up to 1 June, suggested that 10% of two-to-11-year-olds and 16% of 12-to-16-year-olds who tested positive for Covid (or suspected they had Covid) reported experiencing symptoms for at least 12 weeks.

The discrepancy between the ONS figures and the new study could be explained in part by the differences in the way the end of Covid illness was defined, said Absoud, adding that ONS data is also collected monthly and relies on individuals remembering details of when symptoms were experienced, whereas this study collected the data in real time.

US research suggests that the risk of myocarditis, a condition characterised by heart inflammation, is [elevated in Covid patients 12 to 17](#) years old. This study did not query participants about this specifically, said senior study author Emma Duncan, professor of clinical endocrinology at King's College London.

Overall, the data shows that some children really do experience prolonged illness with Covid, but that things get better with time, Duncan said, and added: "It's important to think about whether there are other diagnoses – and

not to assume that just because the person has had a positive test for Sars-CoV-2, that everything is due to that.”

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Working from home

UK workers feel pressure to hide mental health concerns, survey finds

As staff are urged to stop working from home, employees report feeling less resilient and stressed



In England, workers have been encouraged to gradually start returning to offices and other workplaces. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

In England, workers have been encouraged to gradually start returning to offices and other workplaces. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Rob Davies

@ByRobDavies

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Workers feel under pressure to disguise their mental health struggles from colleagues despite feeling less able to cope than they did before the pandemic, according to research released as the government advocates a return to the workplace.

About half (51%) of respondents to a survey said they felt under pressure to put on a brave face at work, while four in 10 said they felt less resilient since the Covid crisis struck.

Fewer than one in six (16%) said they felt their mental health was very well supported at work, despite 81% wanting their employers to give them help with their mental wellbeing.

The findings, from a survey of more than 2,000 people commissioned by Lime Insurance, emerged just as ministers start to ramp up pressure on the British workforce to reduce the amount they work from home.

This week the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, suggested that [a return to office working was particularly important for young people](#).

“I doubt I would have had those strong relationships if I was doing my summer internship or my first bit of my career over Teams and Zoom,” he told LinkedIn News.

“That’s why I think for young people in particular, being able to physically be in an office is valuable.”

The government has said that people should [gradually start returning to offices and other workplaces](#) in England, since restrictions were eased on 19 July. By contrast, the Scottish government is encouraging working from home until at least 9 August, where possible.

The latest survey results suggest many workers are anxious about having to be around other people again while they are struggling with their mental health.

Almost one in five surveyed said they were concerned about their stress being visible to others, while 26% said they did not think they were coping.

Over a third felt the same way about everyday life and 40% said they felt less resilient now than they did before the pandemic.

Young people are bearing the brunt of these challenges, with the research suggesting 43% of women aged 16-24 and 49% of men aged 16-24 feel less

resilient now than they did before the pandemic.

Women also feel they are under more pressure than male colleagues to hide any mental health issues, with younger women feeling the pressure the most, Lime said.

Workers said that employers should help them by paying more attention to workload and work/life balance, allowing greater flexibility in working hours and time out to deal with personal commitments, as well as offering mental health days off work.

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Scotland to scrap social distancing amid plan to lift most Covid rules

Nicola Sturgeon confirms blanket self-isolation measures for school pupils will also end from 9 August

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02:06

Scotland to lift most coronavirus restrictions from 9 August – video

[Libby Brooks](#) Scotland correspondent

Tue 3 Aug 2021 10.06 EDT

The legal requirement for physical distancing in Scotland will be removed from next week, [Nicola Sturgeon](#) has said, as she confirmed the country would move beyond level 0 of the Scottish government's five-tier system of Covid controls from 9 August.

Blanket self-isolation for school pupils will also be scrapped in an attempt to avoid continued educational disruption: when Scottish schools return over the next two weeks, pupils will no longer be required to isolate for 10 days when someone in their bubble tests positive for Covid, as long as they test negative themselves.

But for the first six weeks of the new term, face coverings for secondary schoolchildren and staff will remain mandatory in classrooms and around

school buildings, while staff will be asked to keep at least a metre from one another and from children on the school premises.

In a statement to MSPs, who had been recalled from summer recess for the virtual session on Tuesday afternoon, Scotland's first minister set out plans for the lifting of most legal coronavirus restrictions, meaning an end to limits on the size of gatherings and the removal of the requirement for 1-metre social distancing.

With the whole of Scotland currently in level 0, the country will from next Monday finally exit the [five-level framework](#) of Covid controls it has been operating under since last November.

But Sturgeon and the health secretary, Humza Yousaf, emphasised that talk of “freedom day” was premature and “it is important to be clear that it does not signal the end of the pandemic or a return to life exactly as we knew it before Covid struck”.

Sturgeon said the harm the virus could do, in particular through the impact of long Covid, should not be underestimated, while Covid’s ability to mutate “may yet pose us real challenges”.

Setting out what she described as “sensible and cautious” mitigations, Sturgeon said face coverings would remain mandatory in indoor settings such as retail, hospitality and public transport “for some time to come”, and that it would remain a requirement for indoor hospitality and similar venues to collect the contact details of customers.

Scottish government advice to continue to work from home where possible will remain in place for now, and Sturgeon said her government would “continue to use travel restrictions, as and when necessary, to restrict the spread of outbreaks and protect against the risk of importation of new variants”.

In a “careful return” to large-scale events, organisers of outdoor events of more than 5,000 people and indoor events of more than 2,000 will have to

apply for permission to go ahead, to allow local authorities to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to reduce risk.

The automatic requirement to self-isolate for an adult identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid will be removed, provided they are fully vaccinated and can provide a negative PCR test.

Sturgeon told MSPs the move beyond level 0 reflected the fact Scotland was “in a different stage of this pandemic”, removing the need to rely on blanket regulations.

“Vaccination has weakened the link between case numbers and serious health harms, and that means it is no longer appropriate or necessary – and therefore not necessarily even lawful – for us to rely as heavily as we did previously on blanket rules and regulations,” she said.

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Vaccines and immunisation

Vaccinologist Barbie: Prof Sarah Gilbert honoured with a doll

Co-creator of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab hopes it will inspire young girls to enter Stem careers

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Prof Sarah Gilbert receives her Barbie doll in Oxford. Photograph: Andy Paradise/Rex/Shutterstock

Prof Sarah Gilbert receives her Barbie doll in Oxford. Photograph: Andy Paradise/Rex/Shutterstock

[Nicola Slawson](#)

Wed 4 Aug 2021 00.00 EDT

Prof Sarah Gilbert has had quite a year. The co-creator of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab has been made a dame, been given an emotional

standing ovation at Wimbledon – and now a Barbie doll has been made in her honour.

Gilbert, who led the development of [the Covid vaccine](#) at Oxford University, said she initially found the gesture “very strange” but hoped it would inspire young girls to work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem).

“I am passionate about inspiring the next generation of girls into Stem careers and hope that children who see my Barbie will realise how vital careers in science are to help the world around us,” she said. “My wish is that my doll will show children careers they may not be aware of, like a vaccinologist.”

As well as the likeness of Dame Sarah, the toy company has created models in honour of five other women working in Stem around the world.

[Springsteen's back on Broadway – and now AstraZeneca vaccine recipients are allowed](#)

[Read more](#)

They include US healthcare workers Amy O’Sullivan and Dr Audrey Cruz, Canadian doctor and campaigner Dr Chika Stacy Oriuwa, Brazilian biomedical researcher Dr Jaqueline Goes de Jesus and Dr Kirby White, an Australian medic who co-created a reusable gown for frontline staff.

Lisa McKnight, senior vice-president and global head of Barbie and dolls at Mattel, said: “Barbie recognises that all frontline workers have made tremendous sacrifices when confronting the pandemic and the challenges it heightened. To shine a light on their efforts, we are sharing their stories … to inspire the next generation to take after these heroes and give back.”



BBC Radio 1 DJ Clara Amfo holding the Barbie doll created in her likeness.
Photograph: Michael Bowles/Mattel/PA

Over the years, Mattel has made dolls to the likeness of stars including Johnny Depp, Jennifer Lopez and Cher, in celebration of their career milestones. Last month a Barbie doll modelled on tennis star Naomi Osaka sold out hours after its launch.

Meanwhile earlier this year Radio 1 presenter Clara Amfo unveiled a Barbie doll in her image. Known for fighting racial inequality and championing women's rights, Amfo's Barbie was released ahead of International Women's Day in March.

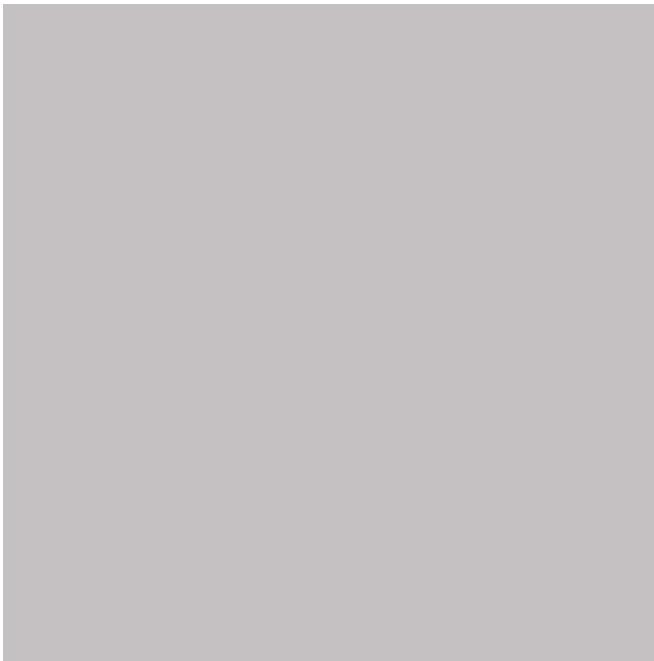
Mattel also recently released a Rosa Parks Barbie (as part of its Inspiring Women series).

In 2019, Barbie was accused of having a “wokeover” after Mattel launched a new range of gender-inclusive dolls that are free of labels.

They join a growing list of inclusive Barbies and Kens. There's now a Barbie that uses a wheelchair, a black Barbie with a natural hairstyle, and a Ken with a slightly higher BMI.

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A protests outside the Department for Education in August 2020 over the A-level results chaos. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

[Guardian morning briefing](#)

Wednesday briefing: Lockdown schooling chaos ‘unforgivable’

A protests outside the Department for Education in August 2020 over the A-level results chaos. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

Report criticises second cancellation of exams in 2021 ... Biden calls for Cuomo to resign ... and how Simone Biles broke boundaries

by [Warren Murray](#)

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.31 EDT

Top story: No backup plan for 2021 exams

Good morning – Warren Murray meeting you in the middle of the week.

The government’s refusal to draw up schooling contingency plans before a second lockdown – insisting schools in England would remain open this year and exams would go ahead – was an “unforgivable” error that left teachers and parents in England to deal with chaos, the Institute for Government has said. Its report claims senior figures from the prime minister down [opposed creating backup plans for assessing A-levels, GCSEs and other qualifications](#). A Department for Education spokesperson said: “Contrary to the claims in this report, contingency plans for restrictions on schools opening in the 2021-22 academic year were first published in August 2020, and contingency plans for qualifications in 2021 were first discussed with Ofqual in October 2020.”

Children aged 16 and 17 across the UK [could be given access to Covid vaccinations](#) in the coming days, according to Nicola Sturgeon, after it emerged that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation was reconsidering its advice for young people. [Scotland is to scrap social distancing from 9 August](#) as part of a plan to lift most Covid rules, the first minister also said. A study has found fewer than one in 20 Covid-positive children who experience symptoms continue to have them beyond four weeks. On average, symptoms lasted for [five days in children aged five to 11](#)

and seven days in children aged 12 to 17. About 4.4% experienced symptoms for four weeks or more, while one in 50 (1.8%) had symptoms lasting more than two months. Meanwhile, the government is hoping the country is past the worst of the third wave, with daily new cases of Covid across the UK falling to 21,691 on Tuesday and hospital admissions dropping to 731. There were 138 deaths. Covid updates all day [at our live blog](#).

Immunity idol – Prof Sarah Gilbert, the co-creator of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, has [had a Barbie doll made in her honour](#). Gilbert said she initially found the gesture “very strange” but hoped it would inspire young girls to work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem). “My wish is that my doll will show children careers they may not be aware of, like a vaccinologist.”



Prof Sarah Gilbert with the miniature Prof Sarah Gilbert. Photograph: Andy Paradise/Rex/Shutterstock

The toy company Mattel has created models in honour of five other women working in Stem around the world: the US healthcare workers Amy O’Sullivan and Dr Audrey Cruz, the Canadian doctor and campaigner Dr Chika Stacy Oriuwa, Brazilian biomedical researcher Dr Jaqueline Goes de

Jesus, and Dr Kirby White, an Australian medic who co-created a reusable gown for frontline staff.

Midweek catch-up

- > Iranian-backed forces are suspected of [seizing a tanker ship off the coast of the United Arab Emirates](#). It follows an attack last week on a tanker which killed two crew and was blamed on Iran by the US, Israel and Britain. Both are denied by Iran.
- > Joe Biden has led calls from both parties [for the New York governor, Andrew Cuomo, to resign](#) after an investigation found he had sexually harassed 11 women. Cuomo said he “never touched anyone inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances” and made clear he had no intention of stepping down.
- > Workers feel under pressure to disguise their mental health struggles from colleagues despite feeling [less able to cope than they did before the pandemic](#), according to research released as the government advocates returning to the office.
- > North Korea wants international sanctions eased – including on [imports of high-class liquor and suits for Pyongyang’s elite](#) – before it will restart denuclearisation talks with the US, South Korean lawmakers have said.

Make do and mend – Reusing and repairing the UK’s household goods, from washing machines to phones, and recycling things like plastic bottles could [create 450,000 green jobs over the next 15 years](#), many of them in areas of manufacturing decline, the Green Alliance thinktank has found. It says the UK creates thousands of tonnes of unnecessary waste each year because of a failure to value it as a resource. For instance, a refurbished iPhone can be sold for about half of its original price, but when recycled is worth just 0.24%. The Green Alliance is calling for a halving of UK resource use by 2050; zero rating of VAT on repairs and refurbishment; and worker training programmes. The UK now requires white goods to have spare parts available within two years of introduction, and for seven to 10 years after discontinuation, but computers and smartphones are so far excluded.

Test for Turing – The government’s replacement for the Europe-wide Erasmus student exchange scheme has made a strong start, although experts warn final numbers taking part are likely to be well below initial expectations. The Department for Education said more than 40,000 young people “will be able to work and study abroad” later this year [through the new Turing scheme](#). Prof Paul James Cardwell of City Law School, University of London, who has compared the schemes, said: “All opportunities to study abroad are welcome, but we need to be clear about how many students will actually go abroad, which will probably be much lower than the numbers that have been bid for.” Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, said 48% of applicants were expected to be from disadvantaged backgrounds. Disadvantaged students will be eligible for funding to cover extra expenses such as visas and passports.

Time for games is over – China’s regulators have pushed the technology company Tencent into stricter limits on the time the country’s children spend playing its computer games. Minors playing Honor of Kings will now be allowed to [play for only a single hour each day](#), and two hours on holidays; it will also block children under 12 from spending money in-game. Tencent has also rolled out the “midnight-patrol” across its games, using facial recognition to stop young players logging in between 10pm and 8am. The measures will be eyed with mild jealousy by many western parents – and kids, be warned: Tencent owns 40% of Fortnite maker Epic Games, 81.4% of Clash of Clans company Supercell, and 5% of Activision Blizzard, behind both World of Warcraft and Call of Duty. The “midnight patrol” system comes as British age verification providers are themselves gearing up to offer facial analysis-based online age checks.

Today in Focus podcast: How Simone Biles changed gymnastics

US gymnastics superstar Simone Biles changed what fans of the sport thought was physically possible. Now she is at the [forefront of a new conversation about athletes and mental health](#).

Today in Focus

How Simone Biles changed gymnastics

00:00:00

00:26:32

Lunchtime read: ‘Do you blame us for house prices?’

What is really going on with virtual sex and identity politics – and [when did people stop caring about snooker](#)? Four people born in 2000 offer their advice to people in their 50s, 60s and 70s.



Composite: David Levene/Guardian/Getty

Sport

Sky Brown, Britain’s youngest ever summer Olympian, [has won a bronze medal](#) in the women’s park skateboarding. The 13-year-old prevented a Japanese clean sweep in the new event in a thrilling final in Tokyo overnight. The reign of Britain’s women as Olympic hockey champions [has](#)

[ended in brutal fashion](#) with a 5-1 defeat to the Netherlands in the semi-final. They can still play for bronze in the third-place match. Other medal hopes for Team GB this morning lie with boxer Ben Whittaker (07:35 BST) in the light-heavyweight gold-medal bout this morning, Jason Kenny in men's track cycling sprint (from 07:30 BST) and Hannah Miles and Eilidh McIntyre in sailing's 470-class gold race. Injury-hit Katrina Johnson-Thompson has made a decent start to the heptathlon, while America's Sydney McLaughlin [broke the world record](#) to win the 400m hurdles. Follow all the action [at our live blog](#).

The first test between England and India starts at Trent Bridge today with the vulnerability of the home side [giving the visitors plenty of grounds for hope](#) that they can win. A late Steven Davis goal gives Rangers a lifeline after their 2-1 defeat to Malmo in the Champions League qualifying first leg last night. Arsenal want to buy James Maddison from Leicester and the midfielder [is reportedly keen on a move](#) to the Emirates which could be worth £60m. Our Premier League preview continues with [a look at how Burnley might fare this season](#). Lions coach Warren Gatland will take [one last spin of the roulette wheel](#) before the weekend's Test decider against South Africa.

Business

Asian stocks have mostly been higher, though the Nikkei dipped, as traders mirrored overnight gains on Wall Street during another busy earnings week. The FTSE should open in the black too. A pound is coming in at \$1.392 and €1.172 just now.

The papers

The **Guardian's** lead story in print today is “Starmer: PM ‘missing in action’ over climate crisis”. Vital UN climate talks are at risk of failure, says the Labour leader, because Boris Johnson’s [ambition to tackle the scale of the crisis is irresponsibly small](#). Glasgow will host the international Cop26 climate summit this November. “Yet at this vital moment, Boris Johnson is missing in action, while his [climate spokesperson](#) is busy advising people to freeze their leftover bread,” [Starmer writes for the Guardian](#).



The Guardian's front page, Wednesday 4 August 2021

The top story in the **Financial Times** is “Tory chair accused of mixing business and political interests” – here’s [our own story about Ben Elliot](#). The FT also covers the alarming story of a Belarusian exile found dead in a park in Kyiv, Ukraine. Vitaly Shishov helped compatriots shelter from persecution by the Lukashenko regime. Police are [investigating whether it was “murder disguised as suicide”](#).

The **Times** splashes with “All children over 16 will be offered Covid jabs” while the **i** says teenage jabs are “on the way” and the **Daily Mail** declares it another “U-turn”. The **Telegraph** has that news on page one as well but leads on “Iran ‘hijacks’ tanker in Gulf of Oman”. The **Metro** says “Third wave in retreat” but sounds a note of caution with a pointer to one of its stories inside: “Superfit … killed by Covid”. The **Express** says there is “Proof jabs building a wall of defence”. The **Mirror** celebrates “King Kenny” – Jason Kenny became the most successful British Olympian while his wife, Laura Kenny, added her fifth Olympic gong with their [respective silver medals in cycling](#).

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Cop26: Glasgow climate change conference 2021

Boris Johnson ‘missing in action’ ahead of vital climate talks, says Keir Starmer

Exclusive: Labour leader says prime minister’s lack of ambition risks failure of Cop26

- [Opinion: Britain could be taking the lead in tackling the climate crisis. Where's the ambition?](#)



The PM and Sir David Attenborough at the launch of the Cop26 at the Science Museum, London. Starmer says the PM is delivering ‘a cabaret of soundbites’ rather than the global leadership needed. Photograph: PA

The PM and Sir David Attenborough at the launch of the Cop26 at the Science Museum, London. Starmer says the PM is delivering ‘a cabaret of soundbites’ rather than the global leadership needed. Photograph: PA

Fiona Harvey Environment correspondent

Tue 3 Aug 2021 14.00 EDT

Vital UN climate talks are at risk of failure because [Boris Johnson](#) is “missing in action” while his climate spokesperson talks about freezing bread, Keir Starmer has warned.

The Labour leader said there is already “dystopia” all around caused by climate breakdown, but Johnson’s ambition to tackle the scale of the crisis is irresponsibly small.

The UK will host the [Cop26](#) summit in Glasgow this November, where countries must set out plans for drastic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions for this decade, to avoid catastrophic and irreversible changes to the climate.

“As host of the summit, the world is looking to Britain to deliver,” writes Starmer in today’s Guardian. “We cannot afford to miss this moment, but I fear we will.”

The government was [off-track to meet its own climate targets](#), while ministers scrapped measures to reduce emissions such as the [green homes grant insulation scheme](#), and were allowing high-carbon development, such as a potential new coalmine, Starmer wrote.

The prime minister was delivering “a cabaret of soundbites” rather than the global leadership needed, he charged.

“All over the world, unusual weather events show that dystopia is not on the horizon. It is here today, all around us,” he wrote.

“At this vital moment, our prime minister is missing in action, while his climate spokesperson is busy advising people to freeze their leftover bread. When the issues at stake are so large, it really is irresponsible for the response to be so small.”

[100 days to Cop26: protesters urge Boris Johnson to take climate talks seriously](#)

[Read more](#)

Downing Street has faced [mounting criticism over its conduct of Cop26](#), the outcome of which some observers described as “hanging in the balance”.

The government's host year kicked off with [scientists chastising ministers over plans for a new coalmine](#) in Cumbria, while [diplomats despaired over the decision to slash overseas aid](#), considered a disastrous signal to other countries as a crucial goal of Cop26 will be raising \$100bn a year for the developing world.

The prime minister's spokesperson for Cop26, Allegra Stratton, has also made headlines recently, [appearing to reject electric cars](#), suggesting people could [join the Green party](#), and saying the government's 2050 net zero emissions target was [too far off](#). Diplomatic eyebrows were also raised when [John Kerry, the US climate envoy, made a major speech in Kew Gardens](#) that no government minister attended.

John Sauven, executive director of Greenpeace UK, said: “Boris Johnson has mastered the dark art of setting bold long-term targets but ducked implementing policies that will make a difference. He needs to start delivering on the tough choices needed for a successful low-carbon economy. As host of the Glasgow summit, the world’s eyes are on us to prove there is a solution to the climate emergency. If we fail, the summit fails. So far the omens are not good.”

Starmer told the Guardian in an interview that the impression was one of a government long on climate rhetoric but short on action, and hampered by Johnson’s own character. “[Success at Cop26] requires leadership, diplomacy and coalition-building. But the prime minister’s reputation on the global stage is not good – he is known for rule-breaking, rather than coalition-building,” he said.

Starmer said he was moved to intervene as he began a two-day visit to Glasgow, to meet members of a local youth forum and Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar, to discuss young people’s perspectives on the climate crisis and Labour’s plans for green investment. “Sitting by and watching this government fail to lead would be the worst possible thing Labour could do. If we can goad them into stronger leadership that would be better for Britain and the planet.”

“He [Johnson] should be leading from the front,” said Starmer.

He said Labour – like US president Joe Biden – would have more credible and serious ambition, with a [£30bn investment](#) in a green recovery from the pandemic.

Whitehall insiders said the government was [working hard behind the scenes](#) on the talks, with Cop president-designate Alok Sharma taking on a punishing travel schedule to key countries. Last week, ministers from more than 50 countries met in London, with some progress on forging relationships among countries that have been unable to meet in person for more than 18 months, but [disappointment on efforts to make a bold commitment to phase out coal](#).

[The Guardian view on the climate summit: 100 days to save the world | Editorial](#)

[Read more](#)

Some major countries – including [China](#) and India – have also yet to produce [plans for their emissions cuts to 2030](#), a crucial goal for Cop26.

Some participants in the talks praised the government for staying firm on its target of holding global heating to 1.5C, and said there was still time to craft a deal that would set the world on a path to meeting the 2015 Paris agreement, and staving off the worst ravages of climate breakdown.

Early next week, amid recent extreme weather around the world, the stakes for Cop26 will be raised higher still, when [scientists produce a long-expected landmark report](#) on the climate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is expected on Monday 9 August to deliver the starker warning yet that the world is heading for widespread devastation unless emissions are brought down sharply in the next decade.

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Green economy

Repairing and reusing household goods could create thousands of green jobs across the UK

The Green Alliance thinktank found more than 450,000 jobs could be created by minimising waste



Highly skilled jobs could be created in repairing complex goods such as electronics and machinery. Photograph: Vincent Isore/via ZUMA Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Highly skilled jobs could be created in repairing complex goods such as electronics and machinery. Photograph: Vincent Isore/via ZUMA Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Fiona Harvey

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Reusing and repairing household goods, from washing machines to phones, and recycling throwaway consumer items such as plastic bottles, could

create hundreds of thousands of green jobs across the UK, a [thinktank has found](#).

The UK creates thousands of tonnes of unnecessary waste each year, some of which is still exported, because of a [failure to value resources](#) and invest in the infrastructure needed to re-purpose manufactured goods.

The Green Alliance thinktank found that prioritising the repair and reuse of manufactured goods instead could create more than 450,000 jobs in the next 15 years, many of them in areas where traditional manufacturing has declined.

[Today it's cool, tomorrow it's junk. We have to act against our throwaway culture | Jonathan Chapman](#)

[Read more](#)

At present, many expensively produced goods are thrown away, exported or broken up for recycling, which fails to reflect the value and carbon dioxide emissions arising from the energy and materials that went into its manufacture. For instance, a [refurbished iPhone](#) can be sold for about half of its original price, but when recycled is worth just 0.24%.

Highly skilled jobs could be created in repairing complex goods such as electronics and machinery, while about a third of the jobs forecast in the report would take the form of lower skilled jobs, which would be created if recycling efforts for materials such as plastics were stepped up. Plastic waste has for years been exported overseas, where it is often just dumped or burned.

However, [the Green Alliance report published on Wednesday](#) showed that much more effort was needed by the government to spur a “circular economy” where waste was minimised and the value of resources retained, by promoting the reuse and repair of items, with recycling as a last resort. At current rates, the growth in the circular economy is so sluggish that only 40,000 new jobs would be created by 2035.

The thinktank is urging policies it says would boost jobs, including a target to halve UK resource use by 2050; zero rating VAT on repairs and

refurbishment; and training programmes to equip workers with the skills necessary.

Zoe Avison, of Green Alliance, said: “A big programme to avoid unnecessary waste and reclaim the value of materials would not only help consumers but create jobs in communities across the country. This is a great opportunity for the chancellor to show his commitment to expanding innovation, and for the government to show the meaning of levelling up.”

MPs have also urged the government to [consider ways](#) to boost the reuse and repair of goods, including a right to repair, by which consumer goods from cars to TVs must be designed to be easier to repair, [rather than scrap](#). Right to repair rules have been pioneered in France, and came into force on [electronic goods in the EU](#) earlier this year, mandating that the goods must last at least a decade. [US president Joe Biden is also taking action on the issue](#), and the [Australian government is considering similar moves](#).

The UK now requires white goods such as dishwashers and washing machines to come with limited rights of repair, including making spare parts available within two years of a product’s introduction, and for seven to 10 years after its discontinuation, but computers and smartphones are so far excluded. Campaigners say the [rules should go much further](#).

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Barnardo's blogpost on white privilege did not breach charity laws

Charities regulator says post deemed ‘ideological dogma’ by Tory MPs was in line with the Barnardo’s mission



Barnardo's acted reasonably and within the law, the Charity Commission ruled. Photograph: Maddie Red Photography/Alamy

Barnardo's acted reasonably and within the law, the Charity Commission ruled. Photograph: Maddie Red Photography/Alamy

[Patrick Butler](#) Social policy editor

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Barnardo's did not breach charity laws when it published a blogpost on its website discussing racial inequality and white privilege, inadvertently thrusting it to the centre of a culture wars row, the charities watchdog has ruled.

The Charity Commission, which regulates charities in England and Wales, in effect rejected a complaint made in December by the backbench [Common Sense Group](#) of Tory MPs and peers who had [argued the blog was “ideological dogma”](#) that put Barnardo's in breach of its charitable purposes.

The commission told the Guardian that Barnardo's had acted reasonably and within the law, and that the post was in line with the charity's mission. After an investigation it concluded there was no need to take regulatory action.

The commission's decision will be welcomed by many in the voluntary sector concerned they are being unfairly targeted by politicians as [“fodder for phoney culture wars”](#) amid increasing hostility towards charities.

It is the second time in a matter of months that the commission has exonerated a charity which was subject to complaints it had acted beyond its legal purposes by supposedly pursuing a “woke” agenda.

In March the watchdog [cleared the National Trust](#) after Tory MPs, supported by [some media outlets](#), accused it of promoting “Marxist” views after it published a report showing how some of its country houses were built and furnished with the proceeds of slavery.

In April MPs from the Common Sense group [demanded an inquiry](#) into the race equality charity the Runnymede Trust, claiming that its criticism of the Sewell report into racial equality reflected a “political agenda”. It is understood the commission is still considering whether to open a compliance case against the trust.

The Barnardo's post, which [remains on the charity's website](#), offers parents tips on how to discuss “white privilege” with their children. It explains that the charity's white service users faced “inequality and disadvantage” on a daily basis, but those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds face additional challenges due to their skin colour.

The 12 Tory MPs claimed the term “white privilege” did “great damage to the cause of the poor and marginalised”. They described the post as “ideological dogma” and “divisive militancy”.

A statement by the commission said: “We examined concerns raised with us about a blog published by the charity on ‘white privilege’. Our role was to consider whether the trustees acted reasonably in line with their legal duties in making the decision to publish the blog.

“The trustees provided a reasoned response as to how the blog furthered the charity’s objects and were able to show that consideration had been given to how the blog would meet the charity’s purposes prior to its publication.”

Barnardo’s said it welcomed the decision: “As the UK’s largest children’s charity, we believe we have a legitimate role to play in encouraging an informed approach to difficult conversations about complex issues, including racism. We have always spoken out on the challenges affecting the children we serve, and must continue to do so – whether on poverty, mental health, abuse and exploitation – or on the realities of prejudice and discrimination.

“We have also listened closely to those who raised concerns with the Commission, and are keen to have an ongoing dialogue about how we can work together to continue improving outcomes for all vulnerable children across the UK.”

Sue Tibballs, chief executive of the campaigning charity the Sheila McKechnie Foundation, said the case reflected a trend of increased hostility from politicians toward charities. “It is not clear how far it stems from a lack of understanding of what modern charities do, and how far it is driven by a government that does not want scrutiny of its policies.”

Several members of the Common Sense group of MPs were approached for comment.

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[Peru](#)

Scientists discover Machu Picchu could be at least two decades older than thought

A team of investigators used enhanced carbon dating methods to examine human remains from the site in Peru



The historical site is one of the most well-known in the world, yet its past and the people who used it remain among the more mysterious to western historians. Photograph: Ernesto Benavides/AFP/Getty Images

The historical site is one of the most well-known in the world, yet its past and the people who used it remain among the more mysterious to western historians. Photograph: Ernesto Benavides/AFP/Getty Images

[Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Tue 3 Aug 2021 19.01 EDT

A scientific discovery about Machu Picchu has cast doubt on the reliability of colonial records for modern western historians trying to piece together an understanding of the Inca people who built the site.

For more than 75 years, many historians and scientists have worked on the assumption that the famous site in [Peru](#) was built some time after AD1438. This was based primarily on 16th-century Spanish accounts from their conquest of the region. However, enhanced radiocarbon dating techniques carried out on remains have now found it could be at least two decades older.

“The results suggest that the discussion of the development of the Inca empire based primarily on colonial records requires revision,” said the lead author of the research, Prof Richard Burger from Yale University.

“Modern radiocarbon methods provide a better foundation for understanding Inca chronology than the contradictory historical records.”

The historical site is one of the most well-known in the world, yet its past and the people who used it remain among the more mysterious to western historians.

The ancient citadel would typically attract more than a million visitors each year. Yet developing an understanding of its detailed history has been made more difficult by huge cultural differences, such as a lack of contemporary historical records inscribed in a way that would have been recognisable to Europeans.

[Peru opens Machu Picchu ruins for one tourist](#)

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To tackle this, Burger led a team of US investigators in carrying out accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) dating of human remains from Machu Picchu.

They examined the remains of 26 individuals and the results, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Antiquity*, strongly suggested continuous use of the site from 1420 at the latest – and probably earlier – until 1530. The latter date would roughly coincide with the start of the Spanish conquest of the Inca empire.

“This is the first study based on scientific evidence to provide an estimate for the founding of Machu Picchu and the length of its occupation,” said Burger, adding that earlier such attempts did not produce sufficiently reliable results.

There is some debate among academics about the relative values of historical and archeological records in developing historical narratives. “Inca chronology is a matter of debate among archaeologists and historians,” Dr Gabriela Ramos of Cambridge University said.

“Dating Inca sites is subject to speculation because written accounts and archaeological evidence do not always correspond. For decades, historians and anthropologists have relied mostly on written accounts and it is rather recent that archaeological findings, use of radiocarbon dating, and other techniques are contributing to, add to or change our understanding of pre-Columbian societies.

“The fact that very few Inca tombs have survived – because of looting – and, overall within Andean archaeological research, the fact that the Inca period is the least studied [mean that] we still don’t know as much about the Incas as we do about their predecessors.”

Dr Trish Biers, an osteologist at the same institution, said colonial records are important to our understanding of what was witnessed by the Spanish at the time. But that they were “heavily influenced by political propaganda, religious superiority, and the overall subversive voice of the Spanish Empire, which had its own glittering agenda”.

She said: “Scientific methods, particularly on human remains, can give us insight into what the people were experiencing – for example, diet, disease and labour – on both an individual level and population level. Which is pretty cool.”

[Peru's last Inca city reveals its secrets: 'It's genuinely a marvel'](#)

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Ramos stressed that dismissing historical records in favour of scientific techniques alone would not be beneficial. “Without an understanding of the rationale behind Inca politics, Inca religion and the way in which the Inca related to conquered and allied populations – all described in written sources – archaeology would be of little use or would be too difficult for scholars to interpret and contextualise their findings.”

Machu Picchu, now a Unesco world heritage site, is believed to have been used as a country palace by the Inca. Work published in 1945 by the historian John Rowe suggested the date many academics thereafter accepted as the most likely for its construction.

It was based on the belief that the Incan emperor Pachacuti conquered the lower Urubamba valley – the area of what is now Peru that includes Machu Picchu – in 1438 and that construction likely took place between around 1440 and 1450.

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Wildlife

Scottish forests could save red squirrel from extinction

Researchers found 20 areas where the mammal would survive even if grey squirrels colonised all of Britain



The red squirrel can survive in non-native plantations that are inhospitable for the grey. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

The red squirrel can survive in non-native plantations that are inhospitable for the grey. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Patrick Barkham

@patrick_barkham

Wed 4 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

Twenty forest strongholds in [Scotland](#) would save the red squirrel from extinction even if grey squirrels were to colonise the whole of Britain, according to research.

Since their introduction from North America by Victorian enthusiasts, grey squirrels have pushed red squirrels out of much of the country, with reds outcompeted by the bigger greys and also succumbing to the [squirrelopox virus](#) carried by the non-native squirrel.

Grey squirrels have not yet penetrated much of the Highlands but new modelling led by Prof Andy White, a mathematical biologist at Heriot-Watt University, suggests that there are at least 20 havens across Scotland where viable populations of reds would remain even if the greys continued to march northwards.

“This is great news for red squirrels,” said White. “When I started this research 10 years ago I was pretty pessimistic about the outcome for red squirrels in Scotland. Now I’m very optimistic. The work done by conservation bodies has prevented the spread of grey squirrels beyond certain boundaries over the last decade.”

The research, which is [published in Nature Conservation](#), identifies havens within existing areas of non-native plantations, such as Eskdalemuir Forest in Dumfries and Galloway in southern Scotland and Newtyle Forest in Moray in the north. Ironically, the native red squirrel can survive in non-native plantations of species such as sitka spruce that are inhospitable for the broadleaved or mixed woodland-loving grey squirrel.

The co-author, Kenny Kortland, a wildlife ecologist for Forest and Land Scotland, the Scottish government’s forestry body, said that the study showed that Scotland’s timber industry supports one of the country’s most popular species.



Recent conservation efforts have been focused on killing grey squirrels.
Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

“This modelling work confirms that forest landscapes managed for timber production create safe havens for viable populations of red squirrels, even if grey squirrel populations were to expand,” he said.

The findings also call into question the current policy to create 19 managed strongholds for the reds in Scotland by removing broadleaf trees from certain forests to make them better for reds and worse for greys.

“This would reduce tree species diversity for other species,” said White. “Our model shows that over 20 existing forests in Scotland would act as natural strongholds for the reds. This means we don’t have to remove broadleaf species like oak. Natural strongholds could conserve red squirrel populations while simultaneously maintaining forest diversity.”

Saving red squirrels via so few strongholds remains a last resort, with grassroots conservation efforts currently directed at [killing.grey.squirrels](#) to protect populations of reds across a much wider area of northern Britain.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is supporting work to assess the effectiveness of oral contraceptives to humanely control

grey squirrel populations while there is also some discussion of “gene editing” as a long-term solution to reducing the grey squirrel population.

The [resurgence of pine martens](#) has also improved the reds’ prospects, with the native carnivore proving effective at predating or dispersing grey squirrels. But last year a study showed that the pine marten [will not live in urban areas](#), which remain a grey squirrel stronghold from where the species can expand.

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North Korea

North Korea wants sanctions eased on metal, fuel and ‘liquor and suits’ to restart US talks

Amid economic crisis, Kim Jong-un wants restrictions relaxed on necessities as well as luxury goods, South Korea lawmakers say



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un wants international sanctions on items including high-class liquors and suits eased before the country will restart talks with the US on its nuclear program. Photograph: 朝鮮通信社/AP

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un wants international sanctions on items including high-class liquors and suits eased before the country will restart talks with the US on its nuclear program. Photograph: 朝鮮通信社/AP

Guardian staff and agencies
Tue 3 Aug 2021 22.14 EDT

North Korea wants a raft of international sanctions eased – including on imports of luxury items such as high-class liquors and suits – before it will restart denuclearisation talks with the United States, South Korean lawmakers have said.

Pyongyang has also called for sanctions banning its metal exports and imports of refined fuel and other necessities to be lifted, the lawmakers said on Tuesday after being briefed by Park Jie-won, head of the South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS).

The remarks came as the NIS said North Korea was [distributing emergency military reserves of rice](#) amid a severe food shortage and economic crisis caused by a drought and made worse by the coronavirus pandemic. The reserves are usually held for wartime.

[Kim Jong-un signal for help could mark a turning point in North Korea's Covid fight](#)

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Last week the two Koreas [restored hotlines](#) that North Korea suspended a year ago, the first hint in months that Pyongyang might be more responsive to engagement efforts. The move was initiated by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and the two countries were talking twice a day, the NIS claimed.

Citing Park, Ha Tae-keung, a member of the parliamentary intelligence committee, told reporters on Tuesday: “As a precondition to reopen talks, [North Korea](#) argues that the United States should allow mineral exports and imports of refined oil and necessities.

“I asked which necessities they want the most, and they said high-class liquors and suits were included, not just for Kim Jong-un’s own consumption but to distribute to Pyongyang’s elite,” he said, referring to North Korea’s leader.

North Korea's state-run media made no mention on Tuesday of any new request for the lifting sanctions to restart talks.

Washington has given no indication of a willingness to ease sanctions ahead of any talks. US secretary of state Antony Blinken planned to call on south-east Asian counterparts in a virtual meeting this week to fully implement sanctions on North Korea, department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday.

Price reiterated on Tuesday that the US was willing to meet North Korea "anytime, anywhere, without preconditions," but there had been no response.

Another state department spokesperson added, "In the meantime, in the absence of any type of engagements, United Nations sanctions on [North Korea] remain in place and we will continue to enforce them along with the international community."

The United Nations has imposed a wide range of sanctions on North Korea over its [development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles](#). The US and others have also imposed their own sanctions.

North Korea has not tested a nuclear weapon or an intercontinental ballistic missile since 2017 and a historic meeting between Kim and former US president Donald Trump in 2018 raised hopes for a diplomatic breakthrough.

Trump had two subsequent meetings with Kim but made no progress in getting North Korea to give up its nuclear and missile programmes in exchange for sanctions relief.

On Sunday, Kim's sister, Kim Yo-jong warned South Korea that its joint exercises with the US, which North Korea sees as preparations for an invasion, would undermine a thaw between the two Koreas.

[Kim Jong-un's sister dismisses hopes of US-North Korea nuclear talks](#)
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Kim Byung-kee, another South Korean legislator, quoted Park as saying there was “a need to consider responding flexibly to South Korea-US military exercises”.

Ha Tae-keung said Kim Jong-un and South Korean president Moon Jae-in had expressed a willingness to rebuild trust and improve ties since April and Kim had asked to reconnect the hotlines.

The two lawmakers also said the NIS believes there is no indication that Kim Jong-un has a health issue, following recent photos that appeared to show a bandage on the back of his head.

The NIS said Kim has been actively making public appearances and his movements have appeared normal.

With Reuters and Associated Press

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Status of some UK citizens vaccinated overseas still not recognised by NHS

Ministers pledged people inoculated overseas but registered with GP in UK would be able to get vaccine record updated by end of July

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Vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi said that by the end of July UK nationals who had been vaccinated overseas would be able to have that inoculation

registered with the NHS. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi said that by the end of July UK nationals who had been vaccinated overseas would be able to have that inoculation registered with the NHS. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent

@breeallegretti

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Ministers have been criticised for their failure to let some people vaccinated overseas have their double-jab status recognised by the [NHS](#), after a promise the system would be changed to enable them to do so by the end of July was not met.

In the final week before the Commons broke up for recess, the vaccines minister, [Nadhim Zahawi](#), sought to reassure MPs that the government was working quickly to help those who were inoculated overseas but registered with a GP in the UK.

He said on 22 July that “by the end of this month” that would change – and that “UK nationals who have been vaccinated overseas will be able to talk to their GP, go through what vaccine they have had, and have it registered with the NHS that they have been vaccinated”.

GPs would need to check the vaccine the person received had been approved in the UK – and once that process was completed they could have their vaccine record updated, enabling them to prove their double-jabbed status.

The government is already urging some venues such as nightclubs to use the NHS app’s Covid pass, which only displays people’s vaccine status if they were jabbed in the UK – meaning those who got their dose overseas will not be able to use the technology.

When asked by the Guardian if people jabbed abroad could have that information registered with their GP, the Department of [Health](#) and Social

Care admitted the change earmarked to happen by the end of July had not yet come into force.

A spokesperson said: “Only Covid-19 vaccines administered in England and Wales can currently be shown through the NHS Covid pass.

“We recognise there are a large variety of Covid-19 vaccines being administered worldwide and work is ongoing to determine which non-UK vaccines and certification solutions to recognise.”

The DHSC added that people registered with a GP who were vaccinated overseas could contact their practice – but they still could not use the app to demonstrate their inoculation.

Liz Kendall, the shadow health minister, said it was “yet another case of ministers over-promising and then failing to deliver, leaving many people still unable to obtain a Covid pass after being told they’d be able to”.

She added: “Those who live abroad and have done the right thing by getting vaccinated will feel let down by the government’s failure to find a solution.

“Ministers need to be straight with the public and provide clarity about progress on a globally recognised international vaccine passport – working with the EU and US to get travel moving again.”

Caroline Lucas, the Green MP and vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, said people who received recognised vaccines abroad were “being let down by the government’s mixed messages and broken promises”.

She added that there should be “swift action to make the NHS pass compatible with international systems and ensure those who were told they could use it are able to”, and that ministers should be “clear and consistent in their advice to avoid further damaging public trust”.

While arrivals from overseas are locked out of using the NHS app for domestic certification to prove they have been vaccinated, the government did change the rules from this week to let in those who have been double-jabbed in Europe and the US – so long as it was with a vaccine approved for

use by three regulators: the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, the US Food and Drug Administration and the European Medicines Agency.

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China shuts down transport routes as it battles worst Covid outbreak in months

Every province has advised residents not to leave as flights are cancelled and Beijing suspends more than a dozen rail lines

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Volunteers deliver necessities ordered by residents in quarantine in Haidian district, Beijing. Transport routes into the capital have been closed as China battles its worst coronavirus outbreak yet. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Volunteers deliver necessities ordered by residents in quarantine in Haidian district, Beijing. Transport routes into the capital have been closed as China battles its worst coronavirus outbreak yet. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Helen Davidson in Taipei

@heldavidson

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.50 EDT

China has dramatically tightened travel restrictions as it seeks to control the country's worst outbreak in months, with hundreds of Delta variant cases linked to airport employees.

The latest outbreak has so far infected more than 400 people in 25 cities, including the capital city Beijing, [and in Wuhan](#) for the first time since it contained the first Covid-19 outbreak last year. Cases have been reported in 17 of the 31 provinces.

A further 71 locally transmitted cases were confirmed on Tuesday, the national health commission said Wednesday – the highest daily count since January. Nearly half were in Jiangsu, the site of the airport cluster to which most cases have been linked, and 15 in Hunan.

The governments of all 31 provinces have advised residents to avoid leaving their regions unless necessary, and to stay away from the four high risk – and more than 120 medium risk – regions across China, in a bid to curb further transmission of the highly infectious Delta variant.

[China authorities to test all Wuhan's 11 million residents amid new Covid cases](#)

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In addition to [various lockdown measures](#), Nanjing and Yangzhou have since cancelled all domestic flights, while Beijing has suspended 13 rail lines and halted inbound long-distance ticket sales from 23 stations, according to state-run news agency Xinhua. Yangzhou, Wuhan, and [the flood-hit city of Zhengzhou](#) have launched citywide testing and Zhengzhou

now requires all people to show a negative test result in order to leave the city.

Residential areas, including those home to more than 10,000 people in Beijing, have been sealed off for mass testing. Authorities have also begun [testing all 11 million residents of Wuhan](#).

China's top infectious diseases expert, Zhong Nanshan, said most Delta patients had shown mild symptoms and preliminary studies indicated China's vaccines were effective in reducing the severity of the variant, Xinhua said.

While it has seen several outbreaks since mid-2020, Chinese authorities have contained them through ambitious mass testing drives of entire cities, strict localised lockdowns, and targeted travel restrictions.

However, the high transmissibility of the Delta variant has seen the number of cases rise rapidly and spread far. Most cases have been linked to Nanjing and Lukou airport staff who cleaned an incoming plane from Russia, as well as domestic planes. A cluster of infections among tourists who went to a concert in Zhangjiajie, Hunan, travelling through Lukou has also spread to multiple provinces.

“Zhangjiajie has now become the new ground zero for China’s epidemic spread,” Zhong said earlier this week.

In an editorial on Sunday, state tabloid the Global Times said China could not afford to make errors like those identified in Nanjing, given the high rates of infections around the world.

“The challenge for China is to open controllable windows between our closed anti-epidemic system and the turbulent outside world, which can not only guarantee the openness of Chinese society, but also maintain China’s capability of dynamically clearing Covid-19 cases,” it said.

There are also two other Delta outbreaks linked to Myanmar, including the border province Yunnan, and Zhengzhou which received air passengers from Myanmar.

Additional reporting by Jason Lu

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Japan names and shames citizens for breaching Covid quarantine rules

Officials said the three tried to avoid authorities after returning from abroad, sparking a social media flurry

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Staff at a Covid-19 vaccination centre at Tokyo look over a post-jab waiting room. Photograph: Reuters

Staff at a Covid-19 vaccination centre at Tokyo look over a post-jab waiting room. Photograph: Reuters

Reuters in Tokyo

Tue 3 Aug 2021 19.34 EDT

Japan has carried out a threat to publicly shame people not complying with coronavirus border control measures, releasing the names of three people who broke quarantine rules after returning from overseas.

The health ministry said the three Japanese nationals named had clearly acted to avoid contact with authorities after recently returning from abroad.

The announcement late on Monday, the first of its kind, sparked a flurry of speculation among Twitter users about the details of those identified, such as their jobs and locations.

Japan is asking all travellers from overseas, including its own citizens, to self-quarantine for two weeks, during which they are asked to use a location-tracking smartphone app and report on their health condition.

Japan last week expanded its coronavirus state of emergency to four more areas beyond Tokyo after record increases in infections while the capital hosts the Olympic Games.

[Japan expands Covid state of emergency to four more areas](#)

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The prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, declared an emergency in Saitama, Kanagawa and Chiba near Tokyo and in the western city of Osaka, effective from Monday until 31 August.

Emergency measures already in place in Tokyo and the southern island of Okinawa will also be extended until the end of August, after the Olympics and well into the Paralympics, which start on 24 August.

The surge in cases in Tokyo despite more than two weeks of emergency measures has raised doubts that the authorities can slow infections effectively.

Tokyo reported record increases in cases for three days in a row last week, including 3,865 on Thursday. The number of cases doubled since the previous week but officials said the rise was unrelated to the Olympics.

Five other areas, including Hokkaido, Kyoto, Hyogo and Fukuoka were placed under less stringent emergency restrictions.

Tokyo's governor, Yuriko Koike, has noted that people in their 30s or younger accounted for many recent cases and urged them to "share the sense of crisis" and follow basic measures such as mask wearing and avoiding having parties.

With Associated Press

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'Do you blame us for house prices?' Gen Zers answer baby boomers' biggest questions



Patrick Baggaley is among the four gen Zers here to answer boomers' questions. Composite: David Levene, The Guardian/Getty

Patrick Baggaley is among the four gen Zers here to answer boomers' questions. Composite: David Levene, The Guardian/Getty

What is really going on with virtual sex and identity politics - and when did people stop caring about snooker? Four people born in 2000 offer their advice to people in their 50s, 60s and 70s



Zoe Williams

@zoesqwilliams

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

When interaction between the generations is interrupted – and there doesn't even have to be a pandemic; sometimes we just forget to call each other – it is easy for misunderstandings to flourish. Negative perceptions can build to such a pitch that, even if you had your grandchildren standing right in front of you, you possibly wouldn't want to tackle them head-on. Or perhaps your perceptions aren't negative – there are just pockets of puzzlement.

Four zoomers – Patrick Baggaley, Freya Scott-Turner, Rachel Ayo Ogunleye and Aidan Nylander, all born in 2000 – are here to clear up everything. Baggaley is a chef based in London; Scott-Turner is studying journalism and living in Cambridge; Ayo Ogunleye is studying medicine and based in Beckenham, south London; and Nylander is between two degrees and lives in Newcastle.

**What are the things that every boomer should do?
What changes are needed and what can they do about them?**

Sue Ann, Colorado

Nylander: I'd say one of the big things is empathy. If they put themselves in our shoes, our attitudes might get closer on climate change and other societal things – race, for example.

Scott-Turner: I've got a more specific one. I don't want to make generalisations, but we have a huge issue with disinformation and fake news and I feel as though the older generations are probably more susceptible to sharing and agreeing with stuff. We've grown up with the internet; if we see a viral page that's not trustworthy, we just know. They'll share anything from the University of WhatsApp: "Eat lemons and you won't get Covid."

Why do many of you seem reluctant to vote? Is hedonism more important than politics?

Les Clensy, 63, London

Baggaley: I can understand why young people don't want to vote or don't engage in politics. I still see it as a bunch of 50-plus posh white men. So, for lots of people, that's quite difficult to relate to. But personally I do vote and I always will.

Ayo Ogunleye: I actually disagree with the statement. If anything, my friends feel more inclined to vote now than ever.

Are you worried about the future? Do you see yourself finding a partner and making a life, perhaps with children?

Barbara Evans, 69, Ontario

Scott-Turner: It's funny, because my most important thing would be having kids, but I am quite pessimistic about the future. I genuinely don't know what the world will be like in 20 years. I don't know if I would want to bring a child into it. Monogamy for life is, I think, pretty unlikely. We're always

told we can find someone better. You're not forming a nuclear household that you're gonna stick through to the bitter end.

Baggaley: I wouldn't say I was massively worried. I reckon I will probably end up in some form of quite traditional family, with a partner and children. I wouldn't necessarily need to get married.

Are you anxious about climate change and the threat of having to live underground in the future?

Anna, 71, Blue Mountains, Australia



Rachel Ayo Ogunleye: 'I use probably every single form of social media there is.' Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Baggaley: I have never heard of underground living as a possibility.

Nylander: I think all the scenarios seem pretty dark. I watched the most recent [David Attenborough documentary on Netflix](#) and he was talking about how we have passed so many environmental breaking points. What I took from it was that, for some things, it's a bit too late and what do my efforts actually do at this point? It is quite defeating. So maybe I don't worry

about it as much because it's a situation that I don't think I can handle or I don't think we can handle.

What will the next generation say about you?

Mark Saunders, 58, Forest of Dean

Nylander: I think we will always be remembered as the first generation to experience the internet. I was born in 2000 and I always find it so amazing – like, in 1998, what did they do?

Ayo Ogunleye: They'll probably see us as experiments. We have been through loads of different things and we are the first to do this, the first to do that.

Baggaley: Maybe we're all going to be messed up by the pandemic. That messed up generation, who were locked inside for two years.

Do you believe identity politics is representative of how young people think?

Tim Jones, 69, Brighton

Baggaley: My understanding of identity politics, originally, was that it was a particular group that feels discriminated against, campaigning for their rights – which I think is obviously a really great thing. But I think young people now aren't just sticking to the one identity. And people come out in support of each other. So I was going on Black Lives Matter demonstrations and women's marches and supporting LGBTQ+ things as well.

Ayo Ogunleye: I think the term identity politics is used to trivialise conversations that are actually important to have. It's an amazing thing that we're talking more about how people navigate the world they live in based on who they are. It shouldn't be something to make fun of.

Do you think boomers are causing the problems young people have in getting jobs, being paid low

wages and buying houses?

Moira Sykes, 70, Manchester

Ayo Ogunleye: I would never associate not being able to get a job or low wages with that generation. I think it's more to do with there being so much competition within our own generation.

Scott-Turner: For me, our problems are political issues. We're all going to be stuck paying rent to landlords who bought these houses outright because 15 years ago they could. I would never just view it as: "Everyone over 50 did this and we pay the price." These were policy decisions.



Aidan Nylander: 'We will always be remembered as the first generation to experience the internet.' Photograph: Supplied image

Do you feel that our generation has stolen from yours by insisting that our pension rights are protected while you are forced to pay extra for your education and for our care in old age?

Desmond Birmingham, 58, London

Scott-Turner: I think the odds are stacked against us with the voting system – we’re just outnumbered. We’re not the demographic that the MPs are going to prioritise. So maybe that earlier question was right, and we just don’t turn out to vote enough.

Do you feel your childhoods were constrained by ‘stranger danger’ warnings, urbanisation, loss of play space and a general sense that your early years were being ‘organised’ for you?

Philip Skipp, 73, Oxford

Baggaley: I recently spent a year volunteering at the primary school that I went to. They had doubled the number of students, but the space available stayed the same. So I did feel sorry for the kids there now. If that’s the trend, that is a negative thing. But it’s not something I think about my own childhood; I don’t think it affected me.

Scott-Turner: We love to romanticise the past, don’t we? When I talk to my mum about growing up in the 70s, she says: “We were just really bored all the time. We’d get a tyre and roll it around.” I think we were a lot safer. I had a good childhood. I enjoyed it.

Ayo Ogunleye: I feel like I had a lot of freedom and then got to year six or seven [10 or 11 years old] and that’s when Madeleine McCann went missing. After that, there was a lot more emphasis on where you could go, who you could talk to, what time you had to be back.

Nylander: I don’t think safety is a bad thing at that age. Maybe being overcautious is understandable.

I have been an ardent feminist since my late teens and am having real trouble coping with transgender issues. It seems to me zoomers are very hard on people who see shades of grey. I’m

disappointed by reactions to JK Rowling and Martina Navratilova.

Clair, 69, London

Scott-Turner: Trans people are some of the most oppressed people, so anyone adding to that I find really intolerable. But I think we need to be patient, because if we're going to make any progress you can't call people you disagree with stupid.

Baggaley: Being trans is such an important part of somebody's identity, so to say "I don't understand it" can be really horrible for somebody who, as this person sees it, is existing in the wrong body. Questioning somebody's whole identity and suggesting that they're not a real woman or a real man – I think that's really horrible, to suggest that you can determine how someone else identifies.

Do you feel that we have failed to protect your future by refusing to act to stop the climate catastrophe sooner?

Desmond Birmingham, 58, London

Ayo Ogunleye: I do agree with that statement to an extent. If they were aware of it then [in the 80s and 90s], if they were clued up and just decided to sit back, that was lazy.

Nylander: I don't necessarily blame them; the responses should have been far faster, but that's with hindsight.



Patrick Baggaley: ‘The only people who email me are Uber Eats and Sainsbury’s.’ Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

What would it take to turn off Facebook, Twitter and all the other social internet drugs you take?

Fred Hodges, 75, Algarve

Nylander: I have tried spells of not being on social media, but fundamentally it’s impractical. You’re isolating yourself if you’re not using them.

Ayo Ogunleye: I use probably every single form of social media there is. I would not delete all my social medias, I just wouldn’t. For it to be gone, they would have to delete the whole site. When Blackberry Messenger got taken away, I stopped using it. That’s what it takes.

Is email really dead?

John Lee, 61, Dundee

Scott-Turner: I have 10,000 unopened emails.

Ayo Ogunleye: If I emailed my friend saying: “Do you want to meet up?” they’d probably laugh. Phones are here for a reason.

Baggaley: The only people who email me are Uber Eats and Sainsbury’s.

I would like to know why the young aren’t interested in snooker any more.

Paul, 55, Chorley

Nylander: How big did snooker used to be?

Scott-Turner: I’m really good at online 8-ball pool – it’s on [the online gaming platform] [Miniclip](#). I thought I was amazing at it, then tried to do it in real life and it was humiliating.

Is it true that zoomers prefer to engage in virtual sex rather than the real thing?

Anna, 71, Blue Mountains, Australia

Ayo Ogunleye: I think more things have been targeted around virtual sex during the pandemic. But I wouldn’t say that people would rather have virtual sex than be with a real-life partner – that’s just a misunderstanding.

Scott-Turner: It would be interesting if VR becomes really good. Would we all be in the Oculus Rift, getting it on? But the technology is not quite there yet.

Why do zoomers find it impossible to thank or even acknowledge receiving money, gifts or cards when it is so easy on the internet?

Trisha Burgess, Chichester

Baggaley: I didn't realise it was a zoomer trend. I always say my thank-yous.

Ayo Ogunleye: Maybe our thank-yous aren't what they expect. Like, the other day, somebody sent me a gift for my graduation and my mum was like: "You have to show up at their house with flowers." A thank-you text is not enough for them.

Baggaley: Where does that end? You give them flowers and then they give you flowers for giving them flowers?

Nylander: Maybe we all just need to say thank you to Trisha?

Scott-Turner: Thank you, Trisha.

Additional reporting by Delphi Bouchier Hayes

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Television

Interview

Queen of comedy Charlotte Ritchie on Ghosts: ‘It’s loving, uncynical – and people fall over’

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)

She got gross-out laughs in Fresh Meat, died superbly in Call the Midwife – and now she’s back communing with spirits in Ghosts. Is Charlotte Ritchie getting too famous to buy her own leggings?



Auditioned on Monday, started on Tuesday ... Charlotte Ritchie.
Photograph: DJ McErlane

Auditioned on Monday, started on Tuesday ... Charlotte Ritchie.
Photograph: DJ McErlane



Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Charlotte Ritchie is video calling from her London flat, which she has shared with two friends for the past seven years. “How do I do this? Do I need to quit WhatsApp? OK! I’m here! I’m really sorry, I got my timings wrong,” she says, mildly flustered, having arrived barely a couple of minutes late. “I was very lazily putting on lunch, and then I thought it was later and ... my bad.”

We only talk for an hour but it’s easy to see why her character George was adorned with a series of silly, effusive nicknames in the British comedy drama [Feel Good](#): English rose; a little kidney bean; a Dangerous Mary Poppins. “The fit squirrel reference is good,” she adds. “And Dangerous Mary Poppins, I love that one!”

She is here to talk about the return of [Ghosts](#), the much-loved BBC comedy written by the [Horrible Histories](#) crew, about to start its third series. Ritchie plays Alison, a young woman who inherits a massive mansion that is haunted by a number of spooks and spirits dating back to the stone age. Only she can see and talk to them. Its humour is as sharp as it is broad, and it has proved hugely popular. Ritchie describes it as “really uncynical and very loving. If there isn’t something you like in the first minute, then there will

definitely be something for you in the next three minutes. If you don't like a bit of wordplay, then someone will fall over." I ask who her favourite ghost is. "Politically, I can't say," she insists, firmly. "I am very fair about the group. But I do feel like Lolly [Adefope, who plays Kitty] is often on fire."



It's behind you! ... Robin the Caveman trails Ritchie in *Ghosts*. Photograph: Mark Johnson/BBC/Button Hall Productions

Ghosts is a perfect ensemble comedy, which suits Ritchie down to the ground. "I'm sure it's great and very satisfying to be a lone ranger, heading up something, but I've always worked best with other people," she says. It was an earlier ensemble comedy, [Fresh Meat](#), that made her name. Before that, she had been in a four-piece vocal group called [All Angels](#), who toured the country performing classical music to massive audiences. "The image of the group felt very separate from the experience of the group," she says. "And I think that was a hard thing to bridge for me. I have to be careful what I say, because I don't want to be rude about it. Maybe it's not to my taste now? But it was an amazing experience. I did that for four or five years."

In 2011, Ritchie was in her final year at Bristol University, where she studied English and drama, when she auditioned for [Fresh Meat](#), a series about a student houseshare. She went on a Monday to read for the part of Oregon, a poster-girl for student-activist pretension; she got the job that day,

packed up her house in Bristol and moved to Manchester to start work the next morning. The cast have been in touch with each other a lot recently. “We had a 10-year anniversary. I think it was May when we joined the show. ‘We’ as in the cast, not ‘we’ as in me,” she laughs. “‘*One*’s show.’ Me, myself. Anyway, I watched some of them back, and I can’t believe I got to be part of that.”

I also watched some old clips for the first time in years recently, and I got far more of a twinge of recognition from Oregon than I had at the time. “This is what I’ve realised!” says Ritchie. “Now that I’m 10 years older, I can see how Oregon I was at the time. I’m amazed that I’ve only just begun to realise how much like Oregon I was.”



‘I’ve only just begun to realise how much like Oregon I was’ ... Ritchie in Fresh Meat

Fresh Meat was a hit, and the previously unknown members of the cast suddenly found themselves being recognised. Ritchie still remembers the road she was on in Bristol when she was spotted for the first time. She had just bought some new leggings. “And I was like, ‘Fuck! They’re laughing at my leggings. I hate the pattern, obviously they hate the pattern, too.’ It sends you right back to being 14 and somebody whispering about you in the

classroom.” What did these leggings look like? “They were furry inside, with a Christmassy pattern.” Was it Christmas? “No! It was March.”

After the Fresh Meat students graduated, Ritchie moved to Sunday night, primetime BBC, joining [Call the Midwife](#) in 2015, where she played the beloved Nurse Barbara. It was a shift from Channel 4 to BBC One, from comedy to drama. “Totally different. Although there are comedic bits in it, it was definitely a conscious decision to do something that had more drama. I remember saying to my mum while we were watching it, ‘I’d love to do a show like that.’”

After three series, though, she found she was starting to miss comedy. “And I felt like maybe I was just getting a little comfy, and that’s probably not great. I wasn’t ready to get comfy yet. But it wasn’t an easy decision.” A nation wept when Nurse Barbara succumbed to septicaemia while her husband Tom and Nurse Crane kept vigil at her bedside. “It was the first time I’ve died in anything,” Ritchie says. “It felt very morbid. It’s weird to perform or act something that is really real for people. There were a couple of directions where it was just, ‘Lie in bed and think about the fact that your life is coming to an end.’ I mean, that’s a good exercise in general. I have grown up feeling like I don’t have a very good outlet for talking about death, or it being part of our culture at all.”

There’s plenty of dealing with death in Ghosts, and there’s a similar spirit of openness in Feel Good, too. [The second season](#) was released to much fanfare earlier this year and earned a devoted audience who found a deep connection with its central themes. The programme touches on addiction, grief, PTSD and codependency yet still manages to be extremely funny. “That’s what I love most about the show, the intelligence and the empathy, as much as the honesty,” says Ritchie, directing all credit to the writing by [Mae Martin](#) and their co-writer, Joe Hampson.



‘I didn’t want her to think Friends was all we cared about’ ... with Lisa Kudrow and Mae Martin in *Feel Good*. Photograph: Matt Squire

Martin’s mother in the series was played by [Lisa Kudrow](#). “Lisa is just the best. She was really funny, really cool, really low-key in a way that I guess I didn’t think she would be, because I have this impression of famous Americans, like, having an entourage. I get an impression from Mae that Lisa is really invested in the show, and that’s amazing, because she could pick and choose what she wants to do.”

At first, Ritchie says, she didn’t feel she should mention Friends. “I didn’t want her to think that was all we cared about. But obviously she knows we’ve all seen it, and it’s a big part of her life. So we did end up talking a bit about it. The thing I found so weird is that she hasn’t seen every episode of Friends, whereas I know them really well. So it’s quite strange that we might know her show better than she does.”

Ritchie and Martin lived together in a bubble while filming the series. Given the emotional intensity of *Feel Good*, how was it to be in each other’s company 24/7? “The bottom line is that we get on really well. We have known each other now for quite a long time.” The two met at the Edinburgh fringe, years ago. “And it’s just really easy to hang out with Mae. We’re interested in the same stuff and we like the same dumb TV shows. And by

the time you've finished a day, you just sit and watch something bad, like [Below Deck](#), and then go to bed."

[Charlotte Ritchie: 'Feel Good has been cathartic for a lot of people'](#)

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On the subject of dumb TV shows, Ritchie competed on the latest series of the brilliant [Taskmaster](#). She was a fan, and jumped at the chance when they asked her to do it. "I loved the stuff that was like, 'You have to get a banana into a frozen thing of jelly covered in Vaseline,'" she says. But she won't be back, as only champions get to return. "And I was *amazingly* last," she says. "You have to realise that early on, and do it in style."

She can't talk about what she has on next – she is in rehearsals for something secret, "but not like a big new Hollywood film or anything", and then she's going to see where the year takes her. Will she do more comedy, or more drama? "I wish I could come out with a really offensive statement," she sighs. "'I hate comedy, and I never want to do one again.' But I hope, for ever, a mix."

- Ghosts season three starts on [BBC One on 9 August](#).
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[Beirut explosion](#)

A year on from Beirut explosion, scars and questions remain



The port of Beirut and the memorial sculpture of a giant angular figure made from the wreckage of last summer's blast. Photograph: Marwan Tahtah/Getty Images

The port of Beirut and the memorial sculpture of a giant angular figure made from the wreckage of last summer's blast. Photograph: Marwan Tahtah/Getty Images

Lebanese capital remains a shell of a city as efforts to find who is to blame for tragedy have made little progress

[Martin Chulov in Beirut](#)

Wed 4 Aug 2021 00.00 EDT

When his workplace blew to pieces, dockworker Yusuf Shehadi was waiting to hear back from colleagues who had scrambled to help firefighters extinguish a blaze in the port of Beirut. The fire was bad and getting worse, they told him in their last conversation before a giant explosion killed them, and 210 others, a year ago today.

The catastrophic blast laid to ruin the place Shehadi had worked for a decade. And he immediately knew its cause. “I had taken the nitrate from the dock to the hangar six years earlier,” he said of the massive stockpile of military-grade fertiliser that he had helped move from a freighter to a nearby hangar in 2014.

Six years later it had caught fire and pulverised Lebanon’s main port. “Their phones were dead,” Shehadi said of his eight colleagues, four of whom were also dockworkers who had helped unload the nitrate from a Russian freighter.

He soon learned their fate and that of his home town through the Armageddon-like images that reverberated around the world. Even in a city inured to trauma and loss, the shocking scenes of Beirut’s devastated waterfront broke new ground for the horror it caused at the time, and in the miserable year since when answers have been few.

[A year after Beirut blast, Lebanon sinks deep into mire of corruption](#)
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One year on, the Lebanese capital remains a shell of a city; while most of the physical damage has been repaired, the scar on Beirut’s psyche remains raw and festering, its impact intensified by the anger of a people denied justice.

“Once, just once – especially now – this country could have delivered an outcome for its people,” said Fadia Doumit, as she stared at the tangled mess of metal and masonry strewn across what used to be the port, near where she works. The enormous debris field is in almost the same state as it was a year ago, a memorial to a day that has come to define the dysfunction of Lebanon and the complicity of its leaders.

Attempts at judicial inquiries over the past year have led to several dozen bureaucrats being detained, but leaders have refused to be questioned or to vote in favour of lifting immunity that protects them from prosecution. “The Lebanese state cannot and will not investigate itself,” said Shadi Haddid, from the town of Broumana, 30 minutes from Beirut. “No one here is competent to sit in judgment of the other.”

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Questions about the ultimate beneficiary of the nitrate, how much of it detonated, how it caught fire and whether any of the stockpile was removed remain unanswered. “Everyone knows they don’t want to get to the bottom of this,” said Haddid. “It would implicate the whole political class, one way or another.”

In the absence of any effective local probe, it has fallen to local lawyers, journalists and civil-society actors to explore the circumstances around the arrival of the Russian freighter, the Rhosus, which later sunk at its moorings at the port, and what then happened to the 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate unloaded from it.

“They never told us how much we were moving, but it was a lot,” said Shehadi. “And some of it was in bad condition, with water in the bottom of the bags. It was so caustic it eroded the front of the forklifts.”

Over the past year, the Guardian has been told by international investigators, Lebanese police sources and by one dockworker that some of the nitrate was moved from the hangar soon after it was delivered.

Lebanese investigators suggest that it may have been moved to Syria to be used in crude explosives, known as barrel bombs, that were dropped from Syrian military helicopters on to opposition-held parts of the country during the peak years of the civil war there.

“There were several trucks that were intercepted and turned back by [Lebanon’s] internal security forces circa 2015-16,” said one senior official. “They could never work out where the nitrate was coming from.”

However, this claim has been contradicted by European investigators, who say an extensive investigation of the port and its activities has shown that large-scale smuggling of nitrate from the site in question – hangar 12 – was unlikely.

Asked about an FBI report that suggested closer to 600 tonnes than 2,750 exploded, the authors of the report concurred, but said the remainder probably burned in the subsequent fire. A European investigator added a caveat that security cameras showing the hangar's main doors had not been working for up to several years.

Shehadi too doubts that nitrate was smuggled out of the port either at the time it was delivered or subsequently. "There were six doors and they were monitored," he said. "They would have needed forklifts to move it, and we would have known."

Central to investigations has been the sudden diversion in 2013 of the Rhosus to Beirut, where it was tasked with picking up 160 tonnes of agricultural machinery to take to the Jordanian port of Aqaba.

The ship, however, was already at full capacity and not equipped to take on such heavy pieces. Its deck buckled after the first loading attempts, and the Rhosus was impounded in lieu of paying port fees.

For the next 10 months, the crew was not allowed to leave the ship as port authorities tried to trace the ship's owners. "I used to take them food," said Shehadi. "They had no idea where they were going at any point in the journey. "There was something strange about all this."

Of further interest has been the shell company used to buy the nitrate. Savaro Limited – whose ultimate ownership remains unknown one year on – was used only once to facilitate a deal between a now defunct company in Georgia and a mine in Mozambique, where the nitrate could have been used for explosives for mining.

The use of a so-called sole purpose vehicle is seen by lawyers in the UK and in the region as irregular. The London address of the company was also used

to register companies linked to [two Syrian businessmen](#) sanctioned by the US, for allegedly procuring nitrate for the Syrian leader, Bashar al-Assad.

Unpicking the opaque mess of the Rhosus's journey, the purchase of the nitrate, whether Mozambique was ever the intended destination and what happened to its cargo once it reached Beirut have led to cautious responses from most stakeholders.

Asked about a potential link to Syria at the launch of a landmark Human Rights Watch report into the explosion, the organisation's crisis and conflict director, Lama Fakih said: "The investigation raises questions but we don't have anything definitive."

The HRW report delivered a scathing summary of the Lebanese leadership, which was repeatedly warned of the dangers at the port.

"The evidence currently available indicates that multiple Lebanese authorities were, at a minimum, criminally negligent under Lebanese law in their handling of the Rhosus's cargo," the report said. "The actions and omissions of Lebanese authorities created an unreasonable risk to life. Under international human rights law, a state's failure to act to prevent foreseeable risks to life is a violation of the right to life."

"In addition, evidence strongly suggests that some government officials foresaw the death that the ammonium nitrate's presence in the port could result in and tacitly accepted the risk of the deaths occurring. Under domestic law, this could amount to the crime of homicide with probable intent, and/or unintentional homicide."

The report was seen as a validation by many Lebanese. "This is what a competent inquiry should do, and it needs to be replicated by an international team," said Yusra Ahmad, at a Beirut cafe. "Finally something for the leaders to fear."

Toby Cadman from lawyers Guernica 37 chambers said a credible international probe was vital. The special tribunal for Lebanon was "a costly and ineffectual academic exercise that delivered little," he said of a 15-year probe into the killers of former prime minister Rafik Hariri.

“The international community needs to look to a more inclusive, efficient mechanism, such as those pursued to great effect in the western Balkans. We are exploring such an initiative currently, bringing together Lebanese and international legal experts in an independent commission.”

At a verge overlooking the port at sunset on Tuesday, Dana Salha stood viewing the carnage. “It should stay here for ever as a testament to what happened. Where else in the world could this remain unchallenged?”

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[Photography then and now](#)

Shattered and scarred: Beirut's devastation then and now – in pictures

One year on from the huge explosion in the port of Beirut in Lebanon the devastation from the blast is still visible

by [Matt Fidler](#)

Wed 4 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

At least 200 people were killed, and more than 6,000 injured in the Beirut blast that devastated the port area on 4 August 2020. The explosion is believed to have been caused by an estimated 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate stored in a warehouse.

Away from the broken grain silos, and their rotting contents, Lebanon remains paralysed and anguished. [The investigation into the blast has](#)

flatlined, and its perpetrators are as far away from accountability as ever. The global aid pledged in the wake of the destruction remains forsaken by the country's rulers, who prefer the narrow privileges that flowed to them from a crippled system to a global rescue plan that could save the country.

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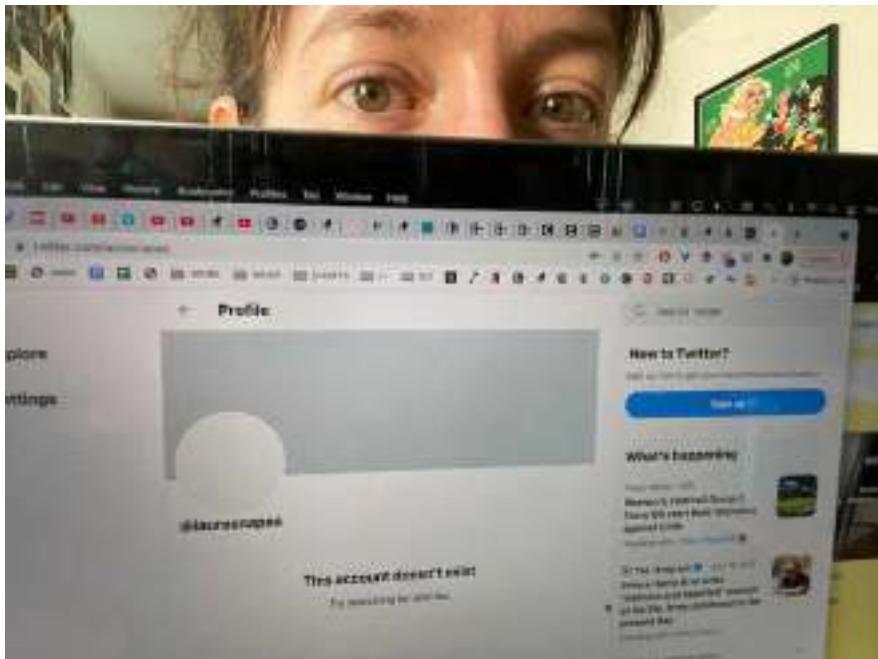
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[A moment that changed meTwitter](#)

A moment that changed me: I realised I had become a masochist – and quit Twitter

Social media brought me better jobs, close friends and love. But I was ignoring the ways in which the constant criticism and approval were shaping my life



‘Disconnecting from praise briefly made me apathetic about work. What was the point?’ Photograph: Supplied by Laura Snapes

‘Disconnecting from praise briefly made me apathetic about work. What was the point?’ Photograph: Supplied by Laura Snapes



[Laura Snakes](#)

Wed 4 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

In March 2009, I type in “twitter.com” and sign up for the next 12 years of my life. I am 20, in my first year of uni. I have three friends and hate it here. But, on [Twitter](#), I can talk to *real music journalists*, my longed-for future people. Two years later, I move to London to work at NME. My social awkwardness makes life in a new city feel like dredging the Thames with baggy tights. On Twitter, however, I have blossomed into a magnificent little chaos magnet. Even on sad, drunk Friday nights in, my phone-sized kingdom glitters.

Real life improved, often thanks to Twitter. It led me to John, still my boyfriend 10 years on, and many of my closest friends. Thanks to being a woman in a male-dominated field, the odd viral review and little talent for discretion, I ended up with 60,000 followers. I didn’t take it that seriously, but acing my first popularity contest felt like winning Miss World, if she had bad posture and trigger-happy thumbs. Visibility brought better jobs and gave me a platform to retaliate against music’s many dirtbags. The mute button silenced [reply_guys](#) and trolls, and I hadn’t searched my name in years, ever since John likened that always-upsetting habit to self-harm – an overstatement that nevertheless rang true.

But I was blind to the fact that I was still a masochist. I didn't consider my articles complete without a reaction. Twitter, teeming with peers, mattered more than a general comments section. I let approval smother my self-loathing and I was convinced that criticism bounced off a hide already calloused by spending my adolescence on message boards, where I was told I looked like "Lily Allen's gangrenous older sister". Evidently, it wasn't water off a duck's back: the stickiest criticism spawned brain fleas that lasted weeks.

I often read that it was good to leave Twitter, which seemed like advice akin to getting up at 4.30am for hot yoga: in principle, sure, but actually I'm really happy here in the rat cage! It wasn't until Twitter made me feel especially glum – a mixture of diminishing highs and the criticism that accompanies being mildly prominent and wildly fallible – that I realised how totally I relied on it for my self-esteem.

One evening this year, spiralling down the self-hatred helix after agreeing with a subtweet aimed at me, I deactivated my account. You can't simply delete it, you have to complete a period of deactivation, presumably because Twitter knows it is addictive. I was certain I would be back the next day. But I stayed off.

It is refreshing to be private for the first time in my adult life

There was no immediate relief. In fact, I felt worse after quelling the squirts of dopamine that had intermittently sluiced my rotten internal landscape. One evening, as I cried into my dinner, John made me outline my self-image. In brief: my best efforts always fail and I must punish myself into being better. He was horrified. I thought everyone felt that way. Clearly, the only bits of Twitter I took seriously echoed that view.

This revelation illuminated other self-destructive behaviours. How would I ever help myself if I didn't believe I was worth it? Commence Project Self-Esteem: Entry Level.

I read the behavioural scientist BJ Fogg's excellent book *Tiny Habits*. I learned that people change only as a result of feeling good; you can't bully

yourself into it. I am especially self-flagellating when stressed; learning how to rest was a start. After publishing my next big piece, I still found myself searching Twitter to see if anyone liked it. But, after gorging on feedback one morning, a new neural bouncer stepped in. “Snapes,” she said, “you’re barred.” I didn’t check the responses to that article again and told friends about my pathetic achievement. Picture [the anime butterfly guy meme](#): is this ... acting in my own best interests? If I stopped this behaviour, I wondered, what else could I tackle?

There was an adjustment phase. Disconnecting from praise briefly made me apathetic about work. What was the point? I had to get reacquainted with why I do what I do. I won’t miss the nightmares about logging on to Twitter, although I don’t take for granted that, as someone with a staff job, I can quit without experiencing the anxiety around “disappearing” that a freelance colleague might feel. My focus improved. It is good to abandon the flimsy awareness that can pass for seeming informed on social media. I know that extolling life offline runs the risk of looking like a scold. I still envy committed tweeters. If I could have rational fun there, I would be toasting my brain on the hellscape with you.

It is refreshing to be private for the first time in my adult life, too. I am not pinpointing the specific circumstances that prompted me to quit, because someone on Twitter would mock me for being a whiny little baby. I know the rules! But fervently attempting to be nicer to myself has taught me that sometimes you have to treat yourself like a whiny little baby, to ask yourself: what is the precise cause of distress behind this inchoate wailing? Does baby need a rest? Reprieve from the horrors of daily life? I can’t offer the latter, but I can confiscate the magnifying glass.

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[Book of the day](#)[Stephen King](#)

Billy Summers by Stephen King review – his best book in years

The monsters are all too human in this noir tale of an assassin on one last job



Stephen King has always excelled at mythologising American life.
Photograph: Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images

Stephen King has always excelled at mythologising American life.
Photograph: Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images

Neil McRobert

Wed 4 Aug 2021 02.30 EDT

No matter what he writes, [Stephen King](#) will always be considered a horror novelist. It's unavoidable now; he is responsible for too many of the fantastical nightmares that prowl popular culture. Yet in his latest novel, *Billy Summers*, there are no supernatural shades whatsoever (save a late Easter egg reference to a certain haunted hotel). Instead, he is in full noir mode, with a modest tale of an assassin on the requisite one-last-job-before-he's-out. It meanders, it pays only the scantest regard to the rules of

narrative structure, it indulges gladly in both casual stereotyping and naked political point-scoring. And it's his best book in years.

The set-up is straightforward. Billy is an ex-army sniper turned killer-for-hire who, conveniently for the purposes of readerly sympathy, only kills "bad men". Tasked with a hit on a small-time crook, he relocates to a provincial city in an unspecified southern state where, due to the machinations of plot, he must live a double life in the local community while waiting for his shot. Like all good King protagonists, he fills his time with writing his life story. It's a tale of violent youth and wartime tragedy that begins as an unwelcome interruption to the main proceedings but gradually accrues more weight as a window on to Billy's off-kilter moral code.

[Why Stephen King's It still terrifies 30 years on](#)
[Read more](#)

For 200 pages, *Billy Summers* feels like a retread of King's alternative-history doorstop [11/22/63](#), told this time from the assassin's perspective. Indeed, it's easy to imagine that the genesis of the novel lies somewhere in King's research into Lee Harvey Oswald.

Like *11/22/63*, the first half is pedestrian in pace but rich in colour and characterisation. King has always excelled at sketching everyman's US, enriching the details into a minor epic register. It's what elevates him above his genre peers, and it's in full force here. Cook-outs with Billy's neighbours, games of Monopoly with their children, date nights and diners – all are part of King's mythologising of American life.

Often this feels anachronistic – Billy's tales of his childhood in a foster home sound more like the 1950s than the 90s, and a present-day visit to a fairground is barely different from a scene in *The Dead Zone*, way back in 1979. But King is not losing his touch. The book has plenty of references to contemporary TV and music, as well as allusions to changing demographics and progressive politics. (Not a single chance is missed to put the boot into Trump.) Any nostalgia in *Billy Summers* is intentional: it lulls us into a false sense of security. Knowing King's penchant for the slow burn, it's easy to imagine that the novel will build over 400 pages towards its climax in the

sniper's nest. Surprise, then, when we find that Billy's time in the suburbs is the calm before the storm.

We can't help but be won over by the eternal figure of the lone individual making a stand

At the midpoint, *Billy Summers* takes an entirely unexpected turn, introducing a character who will alter the course of Billy's life and the nature of the novel. From here on the focus narrows, the pace quickens and the ethics become murkier. This strikes an odd balance with the sunlit, languorous first half. It shouldn't work, but it does, largely because King is so good at character and making us care through incidental details. A little girl's crayon drawing becomes a totem. The song "Teddy Bear's Picnic" becomes a poignant refrain. By the inevitable, biblical climax, unlikely plot contrivances or dated sexual politics are forgiven, because we can't help but be won over by the eternal figure of the lone individual making a stand.

In interviews, King often references the American naturalism of [Theodore Dreiser](#) and Frank Norris, and the hardboiled crime fiction of [Ross MacDonald](#) and [Donald E Westlake](#). *Billy Summers* combines these two strands into the author's own brand of muscular, heightened realism. He may always be considered a horror novelist, but King is doing the best work of his later career when the ghosts are packed away and the monsters are all too human.

Billy Summers is published by Hodder (£20). To support the Guardian and the Observer buy a copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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My partner cheated on me – then told me about the fantastic lover she'd found

This man was well endowed, highly sexed and lasted longer than me. Is our relationship doomed?



It's time for a calm talk to try to understand each other (posed by models).
Composite: Getty/GNM design/Getty

It's time for a calm talk to try to understand each other (posed by models).
Composite: Getty/GNM design/Getty

[Pamela Stephenson Connolly](#)

Wed 4 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

I have been with my partner for three years, and a month ago she cheated on me. We discussed the matter and from that I discovered that this guy she cheated with is well endowed, lasted longer than me and has a huge sex drive. She now wants us to fix things, but I am uncomfortable knowing all of this. I am afraid that I will not satisfy her and she may end up going back to this person and that I'll be hurt. What can I possibly do to overcome all of this?

Don't believe your partner's description of the other guy. It sounds spiteful. Is there a reason why she would try to hurt you? Is she angry or resentful of you for some reason? It's time for a calm talk to try to understand each other far better and to have a chance to express your true feelings without resorting to blaming or name-calling. Tell her honestly that you feel uncomfortable and afraid and say: "Please help me to understand your feelings too." After a breach of trust it takes time to repair a damaged relationship and the hazy spectre of a rival's dimensions is really the least of your worries.

- *Pamela Stephenson Connolly is a US-based psychotherapist who specialises in treating sexual disorders.*
 - *If you would like advice from Pamela on sexual matters, send us a brief description of your concerns to private.lives@theguardian.com (please don't send attachments). Each week, Pamela chooses one problem to answer, which will be published online. She regrets that she cannot enter into personal correspondence. Submissions are subject to our terms and conditions: see gu.com/letters-terms.*
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Car-free coastWales holidays

I could be by the Med: a car-free short break in Swansea



Marina in Swansea from above, on a sunny day. UK Photograph: Alamy
Marina in Swansea from above, on a sunny day. UK Photograph: Alamy

A vibrant waterfront sets the tone for a trip of cultural delights, Dylan Thomas sights, great food and the beauty of the Gower peninsula nearby

Phoebe Taplin

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.30 EDT

Tall plane trees, hanging baskets and pavement cafes line pedestrianised Wind Street as it passes the ruined castle. I don't know what I expected Swansea to look like but it wasn't quite this.

My preconceptions were partly based on Dylan Thomas's "ugly, lovely town" by the sea, "white-horsed and full of fishes". After three hours on an air-conditioned Great Western Railways train from London, I'm striding past the 17th-century No Sign bar towards the city's five-mile-long beach.

Any lingering doubts about Swansea as a holiday base are dispelled when I reach Morgan's Hotel near the marina. The Edwardian building, with its dome and grand staircase, was once the offices of the Port Authority. The decor nods to its maritime history with stained-glass boats, wave-form lamps and an anchor on the stairs; my high-ceilinged, wood-floored bedroom is cool and elegant.



Morgan's Hotel at dusk. Photograph: Greg Balfour Evans/Alamy

Almost next door, [Swansea Museum](#) reopened in June (free, book ahead). Inside its Victorian neoclassical mansion is a jumble of treasures: a wassailing bowl for mulled wine, a mammoth's tooth from a local cave, the gilded cockerel from a church weather vane, a wooden devil carved by an embittered architect, a still-sharp ancient spearhead found in Swansea Bay. Fans of Mackenzie Crook's [Detectorists](#) will love the collection of finds assembled by a Swansea metal detecting group, including a Viking pin that a postman dug up on the beach.

The nearby [National Waterfront Museum](#) (free, book ahead), celebrating three centuries of Welsh industry, is a great contrast in style. Its slate-and-glass halls, opened in 2005, house state-of-the-art audiovisual exhibits with giant quotes from Thomas on the walls. One line of poetry, "Sailed and set dazzling by the handshaped ocean", is painted above model ships at the end

of a cavernous, colour-changing maritime gallery. I have an ice-cream in the museum's waterside cafe and head round the marina, which is teeming with fish, for a dip in the sea.



National Waterfront Museum. Photograph: Paul Quayle/Alamy

A few hours later, I'm watching the sun sink over the deep blue harbour from the open window of [El Pescador](#) and cracking the claws of a Gower brown crab to dip in aioli. The Spanish music, the smell of garlic and fresh fish frying, the boats backed by pine-covered hillside: it's not too hard to imagine I'm somewhere Mediterranean. A fillet of sea trout (known in Wales as sewin) arrives with prawns, mussels and salt-glazed new potatoes in paprika-peppery Canarian *mojo* sauce (two-course dinner £16.95). I look wistfully at a pudding menu that features homemade custard tart or churros with hot chocolate, but have to pass and stroll slowly back past the sunset-gold boats, the bronze waterside statue of young Thomas and his creation, blind seafarer Captain Cat.

“How’s it above? / Is there rum and laverbread?” two of Thomas’s drowned characters ask Captain Cat in [Under Milk Wood](#). There is plenty of laverbread (boiled, pureed seaweed – sludgy and ocean-tasting) for sale next morning in [Swansea Market](#), the largest indoor market in Wales. [Carol Watts](#) took over her family’s shellfish stall here 27 years ago. She and her sister Jo

both live in Penclawdd, eight miles away, where the cockles are still raked from the low-tide sands, as they have been since Roman times. Carol remembers when the cockles were brought ashore by donkey and recommends laverbread on toast, with pasta, in a quiche, or as part of a Welsh breakfast alongside cockles fried in bacon fat.



Carol Watts (left) and sister Jo at her stall in Swansea Market. Photograph: Phoebe Taplin

I take a couple of raisin-dotted welshcakes, cooked on the hotplate of a stall nearby, for a picnic, and catch bus 118 from the nearby bus station to the village of Penmaen. It's half an hour's ride away on the lovely [Gower peninsula](#).

[VisitSwanseaBay](#) has a list of walking routes you can reach by bus. The short ones are mostly circular, so drivers can use them, too. With no parked car to get back to, I adapt the [Penmaen route](#) and make it linear. Following the panoramic [Wales Coast Path](#) a mile or so eastwards, through bracken and pink spires of rosebay willowherb, I climb down the sandy track to Three Cliffs Bay, past carpets of samphire and purple sea lavender.



Walking to Three Cliffs Bay from Pennard. Photograph: Phoebe Taplin

The coast path crosses the Pennard Pill stream on stepping stones (except at high tide), but by the time I get there, I want nothing more than to take off my walking boots and wade towards the sea. The Bristol Channel has the world's second-highest tidal range and Gower beaches change dramatically every six hours. I've been swimming for 20 minutes near a cave under the three crags that give the bay its name before I realise the tide is rising and hurry to rescue my boots from their rocky island. Cooler now, I follow the grassy bank of Pennard Pill, with the ruins of a [medieval castle](#) on the hill above, and wind through shady woods to Parkmill, home of [Gower Heritage Centre](#) (£2 for car-free visitors).

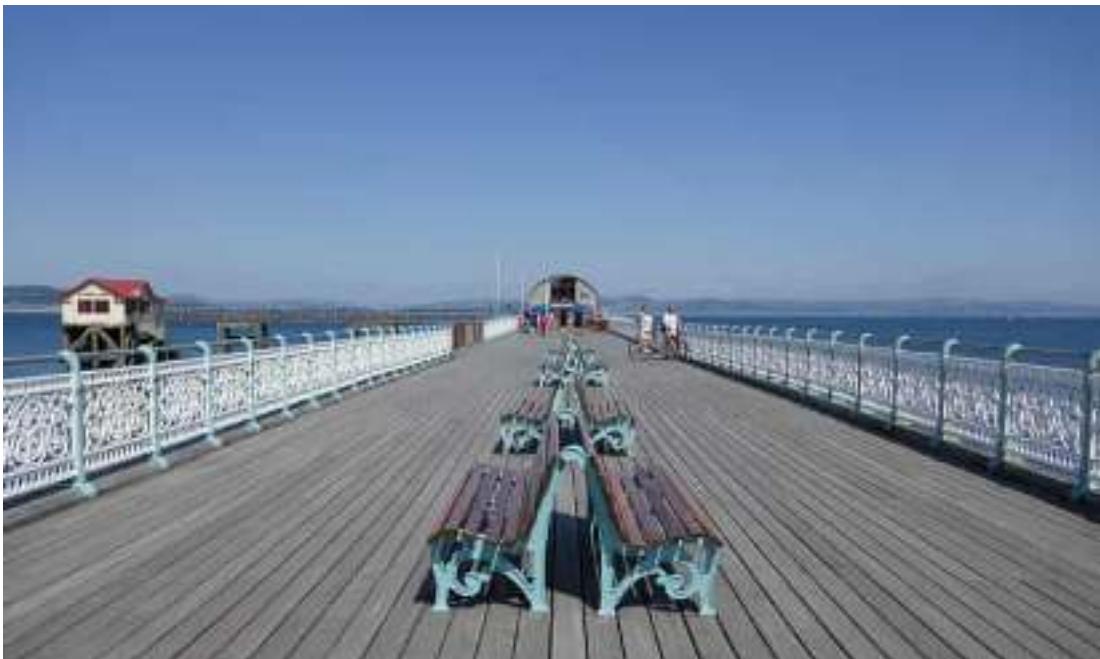
Part craft centre, part farm, part museum of rural life, this huge visitor attraction starts with a working 12th-century watermill and stretches along a stream, past goats, chickens, weaving and wood-turning workshops, and cascades of nasturtiums. It's become a hub for local businesses, including bike repair, bread-making at [Little Valley Bakery](#), and [jewellery](#). Richie Saunders has been making cider here, using an antique press and apples from the orchards, since 2011. He recently opened a shop in the centre, selling his flagship Mill House cider and fruity new [Shed of Heaven](#).



Pennard Castle on the Gower peninsula. Photograph: Alamy

On the way back to Swansea, I get off the bus in the suburb of Uplands, where Thomas grew up – the stop is outside the [Uplands Tavern](#), which served him his first beer – and head down to the coast. At the [Secret Beach Bar](#), I enjoy a jewel-bright plate of heritage tomatoes on toast and a view of what Thomas calls the “long and splendid curving shore”.

With sea breezes, views of the 18th-century Mumbles lighthouse, waving kids and smiling parents, open-topped buses feel like 2021’s ideal transport: plenty of ventilation and a holiday vibe. South Wales has [two new open-toppers](#) this year: bus 1 leaves Swansea and runs beside the beach to Bracelet Bay, just beyond Mumbles lighthouse. From here, on my last day, I walk a mile on the coast path and spot seals below, bobbing and basking near a kayaker. I’m soon sitting under an umbrella outside [Langland’s Brasserie](#), overlooking the long sands and low green cliffs of Langland Bay, eating herb-crusted cod with crispy cockles and homemade gelato with dark amarena cherries (two-course lunch £19.95).



Pier in Mumbles. Photograph: Phoebe Taplin

In characterful Mumbles itself, there are coffee shops, more art and craft galleries than you can shake a lovespoon at, and a Victorian pier. Paddleboarders are drifting and holiday cyclists ride rented bikes from seafront stands (from £1 for 30 mins, santandercycles.co.uk/swansea). [Swansea Bay Without a Car](#) has tips for cycle routes and sustainable exploring. I have just time for another swim before I head to Swansea station. Passing a leaf sculpture and fountain opposite the castle, I see it has a Thomas quote carved round the rim about sailing a leaf boat down “an ecstatic line of light”. It feels like a suitable epilogue to three sparkling days.

Travel was provided by [Great Western Railways](#) (tickets from Paddington to Swansea from £29.10 each way, and [First Cymru](#). Accommodation was provided by [Morgan's Hotel](#) (doubles from £150 room-only). More information from [VisitSwanseaBay](#)

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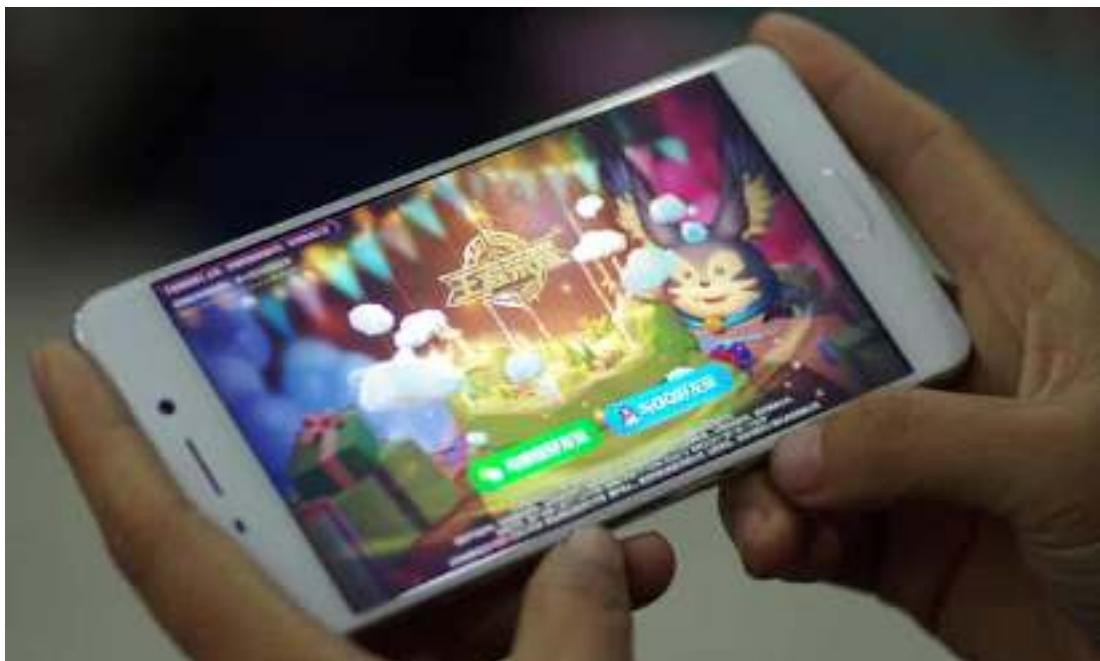
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Tencent

Tencent curbs on gaming time will shock markets but please many parents

China's regulators are on the march again but moves to restrict children's access may be welcomed by many

- [China's Tencent tightens games controls for children](#)



The mobile game Honor of Kings, Tencent's most profitable game.
Photograph: Imaginechina Limited/Alamy

The mobile game Honor of Kings, Tencent's most profitable game.
Photograph: Imaginechina Limited/Alamy

Alex Hern

@alexhern

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

China's regulators are on the march again, pushing one of the country's most valuable technology companies, [Tencent](#), into announcing fresh curbs

designed to limit the time children spend playing its computer games. The announcement may have led to a collapse in Tencent's shares, but the measures will be eyed with mild jealousy by many western parents.

Minors playing the company's hit title Honor of Kings will now only be allowed to play for a single hour each day, and two hours on holidays. It will also block children under 12 from spending money in-game.

Such restrictions are nothing new. Honor of Kings already limited the time young players could spend in-game, though with slightly more generous limits. In 2018, it even began trialling a new technology it called the "midnight-patrol": using facial recognition to identify young players trying to log-on to their accounts between 10 at night and 8am. Last month, the company rolled that technology out across 60 of its games.

In an effort to stay ahead of the censors, Tencent has proposed going even further, suggesting the state should issue a complete ban on gaming for those under 12s, and announcing plans to work with its competition to tackle gaming addiction.

The company's roots lie in WeChat, a Chinese social media and messaging app that combines elements of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and PayPal into an all-in-one experience that is the backbone of digital life for most of the country. It has invested the windfall from that success in gaming properties, both domestic and international.

The company owns 40% of [Fortnite](#) maker Epic Games, 81.4% of Clash of Clans company Supercell, and 5% of gaming giant Activision Blizzard, behind both World of Warcraft and Call of Duty. It also owns outright Riot Games, maker of League of Legends, and its most popular domestic title, Honor of Kings, is a thinly veiled clone of Riot's own game – albeit one with 100 million daily players.

The investments provide more than just steady cashflow: Tencent typically has first refusal on adapting the titles for the Chinese market. It's a mutually beneficial relationship, since western developers are effectively locked out of China's enormous player base unless they partner with a Chinese

company, or are prepared to only access the much smaller number of Chinese gamers with access to imported consoles or VPN connections.

China's government has shown no sign of demanding Tencent implement similar restrictions to its overseas properties, which already feature content unlikely to pass muster domestically.

Beyond criticism of the addictive nature of the company's games, Tencent also faces problems that are standard for many of the nation's creative industries. State censorship, for instance, is focused on not only politically inflammatory material, but frequently also acts against violent or sexual content.

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Since the censors rarely make exceptions for the intended age of the audience, instead preferring an approach that forces all media to be family-friendly, that has made it hard for western games to be adapted for the domestic market, and hard for Chinese developers to successfully export their creations.

But the focus on family-friendly gaming has also led to the Chinese state being held up as an unusually forward-thinking nation by some. Tencent's launch of the "midnight patrol" system comes as British age verification providers are themselves [gearing up to offer facial analysis-based online age checks](#). The systems would scan a user's face to determine their age as part of the sign-up process for a social media, gaming or pornographic sites, developers such as Yoti suggest, which could be required to abide by the terms of the forthcoming Age Appropriate Design Code.

Similarly, the idea of a time-limit on gaming is nothing new, and many services, from Apple's iPhone to Nintendo's Switch, contain built-in parental controls which allow parents and carers to limit children's gaming. However, in a nation where children's understanding of technology frequently outstrips that of their parents, the ability to know that such controls would be set centrally – and to have a cast-iron rebuttal to pestering demands for one more round – could be appealing to some.

Tencent's top five

1 Honor of Kings (2015, £3.24bn) Tencent's most profitable game, Honor of Kings, is a Moba, or “multiplayer online battle arena”. Players join in teams of five, each picking a unique hero to play as, with an array of special powers. Honor of Kings is one of the first major entries in the genre built from the ground up for the Chinese market, and it is huge, with 100m players each day.

2 League of Legends (2009, £1.47bn) Tencent's most successful acquisition, League of Legends is produced by the American developer Riot [Games](#). First launched in 2009, League was one of the initial mobas, and it has grown since to become one of the world's largest games and most popular e-sports. It is also extremely similar to Honor of Kings, a fact that caused tensions within the company. The hostility ultimately sank attempts to launch a westernised version of Honor of Kings, called Arena of Valor.

3 Dungeon Fighter Online (2005, £1.12bn) Developed by another acquisition – South Korea's Nexon – Dungeon Fighter Online is a 2D side-scrolling beat-'em-up game that involves players taking on hordes of monsters with rapid attacks. It lets players power up their characters the more they play, making it a compulsive experience for fans. An early western launch flopped and was shut down in 2013, but a second attempt starting the year after has recorded moderate success.

4 CrossFire (2008, £0.98bn) What Honor of Kings is to League of Legends, CrossFire is to Call of Duty. A first-person shooter that involves players joining two-sided battles in teams of 8, it is unusual in Tencent's stable in that it is being developed by an independent company, South Korea's Smilegate. A western-focused adaptation, from the critically acclaimed Finnish studio Remedy Entertainment, is set to be launched later this year.

5 Playerunknown's Battlegrounds (2017, £0.84bn) Fortnite may have turned the “Battle Royale” style of game – in which a hundred players battle it out in huge arenas to become the last one standing – into a phenomenon, but Playerunknown's Battlegrounds was the first, and still the most popular across much of the world. Pubg, as it's known, didn't invent the genre, but it

was so influential in popularising it that as Fortnite took off, the company launched a lawsuit against Epic Games for breach of copyright.

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

Johnson's disregard for rules helped him get elected – but it's starting to wear thin

[Rafael Behr](#)



From travel to vaccine passports, Covid policy is a mess because the prime minister struggles with the concept of protocol



‘Boris Johnson wears the responsibilities of his office much as he wears his clothes: askew for theatrical effect.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

‘Boris Johnson wears the responsibilities of his office much as he wears his clothes: askew for theatrical effect.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Wed 4 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

Are we nearly there yet? It is the backseat question that haunts long journeys, except in Britain’s pandemic road trip the impatient whine comes from the driver. [Boris Johnson](#) was itching for a release from the moment the ordeal began. He was absent from early meetings of the government’s emergency response committee, unpersuaded that Covid-19 counted as an emergency. Only when presented with dire consequences did he engage with the need for a lockdown, writhing into submission like a toddler being strapped into a car seat.

Now the prime minister feels the journey must be nearly over, but finds it hard to judge this without a definite destination. The virus will not surrender and give him the satisfaction of declaring a victory day. Impatience for life after Covid does not resolve the problem of how fast to go. Infection rates

are [promisingly low](#), but simulating pre-pandemic normality too hastily risks reversing those gains.

There is no perfect calibration of the rules, only judgment calls of the kind that Johnson is notoriously ill-equipped to make. There are few neater illustrations of his incoherent governance than a [traffic-light system](#) for managing overseas travel that expanded from the traditional three colours to a shaded spectrum, unknown in any highway code, that included green, green watchlist, amber, amber-plus and red.

The same problem bedevils vaccine passports. They exist in the hazy netherworld between things that are briefed to the press and actual government policy. Johnson is [reported](#) to be irritated by what he sees as a lackadaisical uptake of the jab in younger people. He is also ideologically indisposed to anything mandatory, and afraid of rebellious Tory MPs whose convictions on that front are non-negotiable.

This leaves ministers treading an awkward line between invitation and coercion. The idea of denying unvaccinated university students access to lectures was floated then dismissed. There is confusion about the practicality, ethics and parliamentary arithmetic involved when the state compels people to have injections that they might otherwise refuse. Dominic Raab characterises the government's approach as "a little bit of coaxing and cajoling". That implies something less enforceable than law.

The public has been more tolerant of the state micromanaging its movements over the past 18 months than the Tory MPs who claim to speak for the nation. Jacob Rees-Mogg says vaccine passports are "not a British way to behave". He objects on the grounds that "ancient freedoms" would be imperilled. That is only true if the law ends up badly written by a government that cannot be trusted with extraordinary powers – a valid concern with Rees-Mogg in the cabinet. He was Johnson's main accomplice in the plan to [unlawfully dissolve parliament](#) as an expedient to accelerate Brexit.

In that instance, outraged remainers were frustrated by British complacency when the constitution was violated. With Covid regulations, it is the Tory

libertarians who are disappointed that the public will not meet them in highest dudgeon.

Compliance with Covid rules has been generally strong and self-policing. The initial decree to stay at home was obeyed to a degree that surprised even the ministers who issued it. The threshold of national goodwill was tested not by the draconian law but the perception that it was selectively applied. Dominic Cummings' [excursion to Barnard Castle](#) and [Matt Hancock's extramarital office snog](#) were tangential to the business of government, but those episodes damaged Johnson more than any other feature of his pandemic record; more than the deaths that might have been avoided by better decision-making from Downing Street.

The prime minister does not escape blame for the fatalities, but that anger is strongest among people who were ill-disposed to Johnson before the pandemic. The same goes for corruption. Voters who were already primed to think the worst of any Tory government find their sorest expectations vindicated by the chronicles of venality: contracts [awarded to cronies](#); Whitehall capture by lobbyists; secret cliques of high-rolling donors; cash for access; opaque funding schemes for the [prime minister's flat](#) and foreign holidays.

None of the chumocracy charges have detonated with the force of stories that lockdown rules were flouted. That isn't surprising. The Cummings and Hancock adventures were personal – a punch in the guts to everyone who had abstained from hugging their grandchildren or buried their dead by Zoom.

But there is a slow burn to sleaze. The common theme is arrogance with power and a view that following the rules is for little people and mugs. The whole business of [VIP fast lanes](#) for public procurement and backstage passes to Whitehall cuts against a sense of orderliness and decency that is baked deeper into British culture than the abstract freedoms that Rees-Mogg would trace back to the Magna Carta.

In the hierarchy of things that cost a government its support, a law that is unsound in principle comes below a feeling that the rules are arbitrary. A recent dip in Tory poll ratings is doubtless connected to the sense that the

government is making it all up as it goes along. And that comes below the greatest offence of all, which is that rules are not what they seem, applied slyly in a way that lets cheats prosper.

[The ‘Boris effect’ is a symptom of Britain’s decaying political system |](#)

[Rafael Behr](#)

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The prime minister is sincere enough about liberty and too inattentive to detail to make a consistent authoritarian. His is a more infantile brand of tyranny that demands control yet is afraid of responsibility. It is a trait that flows not from any doctrine, but from the temperament that sees rules as a personal discomfort and treats duty as an invitation to defiance. Johnson wears the responsibilities of his office much as he wears his clothes: askew for theatrical effect.

That performance is integral to his appeal, but the quality that voters first find attractive in leaders can be a predictor of their undoing. There was a maverick charm in disregarding protocol and cutting legal corners when the purpose was getting Brexit done. The same ethos is more obnoxious when applied in service of Tory donors or indulgence of rule-bending allies.

No violation of constitutional principle could appal the British spirit more than queue jumping. That tendency may not be the most prominent aspect of Johnson’s government, but it is a persistent enough feature to breed resentment over time. It is a problem that will outlast the present policy dilemmas of the pandemic. The current challenge is choosing the right rules. But the origin of uncertainty and incoherence, as with corruption, is a prime minister who is himself governed by the principle that rules do not really matter.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionCop26: Glasgow climate change conference 2021

Britain could be taking the lead in tackling the climate crisis. Where's the ambition?

Keir Starmer

Ahead of Cop26, the Tories are failing to act on their promises. Labour's bold green recovery plan shows what could be done

- Boris Johnson 'missing in action' ahead of vital climate talks, says Keir Starmer



'At this vital moment, Boris Johnson is missing in action. When the issues at stake are so large it's irresponsible for the response to be so small.' A Climate Coalition protest in London 100 days before the Cop26 summit. Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

'At this vital moment, Boris Johnson is missing in action. When the issues at stake are so large it's irresponsible for the response to be so small.' A

Climate Coalition protest in London 100 days before the Cop26 summit.
Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Tue 3 Aug 2021 14.00 EDT

It used to be said of a good politician that they were able to make the weather. The metaphor has acquired a literal sense in recent years as humanity's effect on the climate has become clear. In early July, downpours and [flash floods hit parts of Glasgow](#). As I begin a two-day visit to the city tomorrow, the world is looking ahead to November, when countries' representatives will gather in Glasgow for the 2021 [UN climate change conference](#) (Cop26). The world is looking to Britain, as host of the summit, to deliver. We cannot afford to miss this moment, but I fear we will.

The urgent need for a coherent response is in front of our very eyes. In recent weeks [flash floods](#) have immobilised parts of Britain, [Germany](#) and [China](#). Towns built on rivers have been destroyed and there have been frightening scenes of train [commuters trapped underground](#) in rising water. Record [heatwaves and fires](#) have ravaged parts of North America. All over the world, unusual weather events show that dystopia is not on the horizon. It is here today, all around us.

This is a test of the prime minister's ambition for "global Britain". Based on the government's actions so far, or lack of, it's implausible that this ambition will be met. In 2015, the [Paris agreement](#) achieved unprecedented global commitments. Paris defined the "what"; an agreement at Glasgow is now needed to supply the "how". Paris set the collective ambition to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. This now needs to be translated into concrete action, coupled with an unequivocal promise to deliver. Time is short and history will not forgive a failure to act now.

Yet at this vital moment, Boris Johnson is missing in action, while his [climate spokesperson](#) is busy advising people to freeze their leftover bread. When the issues at stake are so large it really is irresponsible for the response to be so small. This is a challenge that encompasses diplomacy, economics, finance, and targeted investment.

A credible government now would be demonstrating serious ambition. Look at President Biden in the United States, who says that when people talk about climate, he thinks about jobs, and who has a plan for green investment. Labour has the same ambition. We have a plan to support jobs while cutting the substantial majority of our emissions by the end of this decade. But we need to act immediately. The Office for Budget Responsibility points out that acting early could mean we need an average of annual investment of just [0.4% of national income](#) between now and 2050.

The first step in that ambition should be a [£30bn investment](#) in a green recovery from the pandemic. That investment would create hundreds of thousands of secure jobs across the whole country. It would ensure that we buy, make and sell more in Britain. We would be rejuvenating our car industry while helping it move to the production of electric cars. We would be powering our homes with offshore wind turbines built in Britain and we would be manufacturing clean steel to build our schools, hospitals and railways. Labour would pass a Clean Air Act to improve the air we breathe and the water in our rivers. Every decision we made – from spending to infrastructure – would have to pass a robust “net zero and nature test”, to make it consistent with our environmental ambitions.

Under the Conservatives, we are a long way off our climate targets. Among the G7 countries, the UK’s green recovery and job creation plans [rank sixth](#). Rather than substance, Johnson is responding with a cabaret of soundbites. He has promised to make us the “[Saudi Arabia of offshore wind](#)” yet all he has delivered is offshored jobs, with turbines built thousands of miles away from Britain. He promised a green housing revolution before axing his own green homes grant. And as proven by the chaos around a new [coalmine](#), his own advisory [climate change committee](#) has warned that this government is blundering into “high-carbon choices”.

Forty years ago, a Conservative government ensured that the effects of de-industrialisation were felt very unevenly across the nation. Without good leadership, the same will be true of decarbonisation, with good, unionised, secure jobs replaced by insecure work. Under my leadership, Labour’s green transition would be a fair transition. That is the promise of a [Green New Deal](#): an economy that is greener and fairer at the same time.

With 100 days to go before the end of Cop26, the world needs a truly historic result in Glasgow. Often, when politicians talk about the climate crisis, they make an emotional plea for action on behalf of our children's generation. As a parent, I know first-hand the desire to give your children a better future. But the future is already with us. It's desperate that we have a government so firmly rooted in the past.

- Keir Starmer is the leader of the Labour party
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Opinion Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

A shared Olympic gold defeats the ‘one champion’ narrative

Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett



By suggesting they both win, Mutaz Barshim and Gianmarco Tamberi have helped to upturn preconceptions about success



Mutaz Barshim, left, and Gianmarco Tamberi after the high jump ceremony at the Tokyo Olympic Games. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Mutaz Barshim, left, and Gianmarco Tamberi after the high jump ceremony at the Tokyo Olympic Games. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 3 Aug 2021 10.53 EDT

“Can we have two golds?” Mutaz Barshim of Qatar’s [words](#) during the men’s high jump competition, spoken to the friend with whom he was tied in first place, Italy’s Gianmarco Tamberi, have surely marked one of the most heartwarming moments of the Olympics so far. They both had achieved jumps of 2.37 metres. They could have settled it with a jump off. But instead, they chose to share, celebrating not only their sporting prowess, but also their friendship. “Sharing with a friend is even more beautiful … It was just magical,” Tamberi said. “This is beyond sport,” Barshim added. “This is the message we deliver to the young generation.”

It may not be in the spirit of ancient Greek heroism – but then we’re not sacrificing oxen in honour of Zeus any more, either. In the modern age, there is a [long history](#) of medal sharing, and the Olympic spirit – or [Olympism](#) –

as established by Pierre de Coubertin emphasised solidarity, peace and humanism. Barshim and Tamberi's act is hardly out of step with tradition, but it will still have its detractors. It goes against the grain of what spectators have come to expect from elite sport: a narrative where there is one winner, one hero, one champion to rule them all. It's a poignant gesture in this year in particular, which has seen collective action and solidarity become so important.

Nods to collectivism haven't only been happening in recent years in the world of sport, but also in the cultural sector. In 2019, all four artists nominated for the Turner prize asked to share it in recognition of "commonality, multiplicity and solidarity". Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Helen Cammock, Oscar Murillo and Tai Shani hadn't met prior to being shortlisted, but that didn't stop them writing to the judges asking that they be named collective winners.

This was a direct result of the political nature of the shortlisted works, which explored themes of migration, patriarchy, torture and civil rights. It seemed wrong, the artists argued, to pit such varied politics against one another when none was more significant or worthy of attention. To accept the award collectively was a political act intended to highlight cohesion and stand against exclusion in a hostile environment.

['Just magical': joy for Tamberi and Barshim as they opt to share gold in men's high jump](#)

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The right hated it, of course. Was it just a virtue signal for a snowflake era, asked Telegraph critic Alastair Sooke. "Prizes are meant to sort the wheat from the chaff. Here, though, the judges abdicated their responsibility," he wrote.

But the people who make art clearly feel differently about how prizes reify ideas of individual success, merit, or genius – and apparently some Olympians do too. Though a prize can make a dramatic difference to an artist's career, everyone knows that awards are subjective; it's just that we agree to participate in the fiction. No one truly believes that the novel that wins, for example, the Booker prize in any given year is genuinely the best

novel that has been published in Britain that year. It was simply the choice of the people who were in a room together in that time and place, who brought different preferences and life experiences to the table. Hence perhaps the oscillation, depending on the year, between work that is deemed plotty and readable and that which finds itself labelled experimental and therefore difficult.

The rise of identity politics has seen greater public understanding of which artists make history and why, and better efforts to include those who have been traditionally excluded. That's why the 2019 decision to [split the Booker prize](#) between Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo, the first black woman to win the prize, dismayed so many.

Evaristo herself, who won for the masterful [Girl, Woman, Other](#), took the decision with good grace. Asked if she would have preferred to win the full £50,000, she said: "What do you think? Yes, but I'm happy to share it. That's the kind of person I am." For Atwood's part, she said: "I kind of don't need the attention, so I am very glad that you're getting some."

Of course, sport and art function on different principles. Nonetheless, in both cases success is the result of collaboration. A book is a collaboration between the author and their editor. A race – or a high jump – is the shared endeavour of the athlete and the trainers, coaches and nutritionists behind them. So really, the "one champion" narrative has never quite rung true. As for sharing with competitors, some members of the older generation have long mocked the "everyone's a winner"/ "it's the taking part that counts" side of modern parenting, but to me it's a good thing. Collectivity, solidarity and mutual support aren't the enemies of success: rather, in many cases, they are its source.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist and author
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This monstrous glowing orb makes a mockery of east London's Olympic legacy

[Lyn Brown](#)

Few locals want to see the MSG Sphere entertainment venue built, but Newham council has little power to stop it

- Lyn Brown is the Labour MP for West Ham



'Local residents have objections to the light and noise pollution this development would cause.' An artist's impression of the planned MSG Sphere in London. Photograph: The Madison Square Garden Company

'Local residents have objections to the light and noise pollution this development would cause.' An artist's impression of the planned MSG Sphere in London. Photograph: The Madison Square Garden Company

Tue 3 Aug 2021 08.48 EDT

When [London](#) bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games, we were driven not just by sporting desire, but by a vision for a regenerated east London after decades of deindustrialisation and deprivation. We were promised not just new infrastructure and economic growth, but the opportunity to genuinely improve the lives of local residents, including those who suffered dislocation and disruption to create the new Olympic venues. Most local people passionately supported the bid and the Games on this premise. Yet, while the Games did bring significant investment into Newham, there have been clear failures to benefit local people in the years since the closing ceremonies.

Delivering a lasting, positive legacy for the Olympic site was a job entrusted to the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), established by Boris Johnson, then mayor of London, with the promise that local people really would benefit from the impact of the Games. For the most part, the opportunities created have remained out of reach for most local people. Rents and living costs have risen rapidly in the area but these have not been matched by sufficient wage increases or enough accessible new jobs, let alone enough affordable and social housing.

As the local MP, I have always made the case that new developments must meet local needs. Almost a decade on from 2012, I don't think the LLDC has lived up to that promise. And, while the corporation has failed to deliver the positive changes that local residents need, I believe it is also removing the ability of local residents and their elected councils to have an effective say about what gets built in their communities.

A case in point is the [MSG Sphere](#) in Stratford. The LLDC's planning committee meets soon to decide the fate of the planning application for this giant orb-shaped music venue from the Madison Square Garden company. The site was originally public land that was sold to developers with the idea of creating new workspaces and homes, a fitting vision for the positive legacy of the Games. Instead, what we now face is a massive live entertainment venue, almost as tall as Big Ben, covered with [nearly a million](#) garish LEDs, programmed to display videos and adverts. The company behind the concept owns Madison Square Garden in New York, and clearly has little connection to Newham's communities.

I have had serious concerns for some time about the value of this proposed development, the degree of community consent it has involved and the harm it may do to people in Stratford and neighbouring areas. Newham doesn't want this venue, yet it's the LLDC, not Newham council, that gets to recommend to Sadiq Khan whether it is built. I don't believe that's fair or right.

Many local residents have clear and serious objections to the light and noise pollution this development would cause, as well as the potential for increased antisocial behaviour and traffic. The giant venue will beam bright lights into the surrounding area until 11pm on some days; beginning again at 6am or 7am, depending on the time of year. [One constituent](#) has predicted that it will be like living next to the surface of the sun. Many residents feel that living next to the site will be a nightmare.

The planning application has proposed that the MSG Sphere would host 300 events a year, a number far higher than the venues that already exist nearby, such as the London Stadium. It will undoubtedly be noisy and disruptive. Yet there is no qualified professional assessment of the effects that noise, light, moving images and distracting advertising will have on the environment and local people, including vulnerable groups and children.

[The MSG Sphere: will Stratford's giant orb venue really go ahead?](#)

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Crowd management issues could be equally serious. The planning application includes a vague operational manual for how the venue might function, rather than a transparent, detailed and binding plan for impacts on the local area and transport system. And there's currently no commitment to cooperate with other big venues, such as the London Stadium and the O2, to avoid overwhelming the Jubilee tube line and other local transport.

MSG's planning application was submitted more than two years ago, in [March 2019](#). The public consultation that has taken place since then has certainly been lengthy, but for many people, that doesn't make it adequate. There has been a drip-feed of extremely complex, technical submissions with more than 2,000 separate documents and representations available online. The enormous scale of the submission has created huge barriers for

residents, many of whom have had difficulty accessing the relevant information, properly understanding the implications or making an informed, democratic decision.

Newham's residents have little power over the final outcome; Newham council only gets two representatives on the LLDC's planning committee out of a total of 12 members, including seven unelected committee members. I'm calling on the LLDC to refuse the application and protect Newham's residents from yet another inappropriate development. I would hope they would listen to and act on what elected representatives say. Securing some of the promised benefits of the [Olympic legacy](#) depends upon it.

- Lyn Brown is the Labour member of parliament for West Ham
-

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Heyhoe Flint Gate at Lord's is a fitting tribute to the first lady of English cricket

[Emma John](#)



Next summer the home of cricket will pay permanent homage to the woman who opened up an all but exclusively male game to the other half of the population



Rachael Heyhoe Flint batting for England against New Zealand at the Oval in August 1966. Photograph: Central Press/Getty Images

Rachael Heyhoe Flint batting for England against New Zealand at the Oval in August 1966. Photograph: Central Press/Getty Images

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Sometimes you just have to go with the grand gesture. On Wednesday morning Marylebone [Cricket](#) Club will announce that it will be honouring Rachael Heyhoe Flint, the former England captain and pioneer of women's cricket who died in 2017, by naming a permanent feature of the Lord's ground after her. The Heyhoe Flint Gate, to be unveiled next summer, is the first piece of architecture at cricket's hallowed headquarters to pay tribute to a woman. It will replace the current North Gate, the most popular entrance to the ground, well known to the millions of matchgoers who have made the walk down the Wellington Road, sandwiches packed and tickets in hand.

[Dismissed as the unwanted Games, just how did these Olympics steal our hearts? | Emma John](#)

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It is a fitting memorial to the first lady of English cricket, the woman who hit the first six in a women's Test, batted for eight-and-a-half hours to save

an Ashes series and pretty much invented cricket's World Cup. But it is also a significant statement: the only other cricketer to have a gate named after him at Lord's is WG Grace, the game's greatest legend. Only in May gossipy journalists were claiming a new skirmish in the culture wars after a lone voice at an MCC members' meeting complained he had heard the club might be erecting a statue to Heyhoe Flint. Imagine how he will feel when he finds out what it has *actually* done.

Full transparency is needed here: I am both an MCC member and on the club's Heritage and Collections committee. But thankfully it is surprisingly easy to make the case that Heyhoe Flint has had as great an impact on the game as Grace did two centuries before her. The bearded one not only dominated the Victorian game as an all-rounder but influenced the way it was played and popularised it among a huge section of society, ushering in a new and increasingly democratic era for sport. Heyhoe Flint achieved nothing less. Throughout the 60s and 70s she was both her country's best player and the unbeaten captain of the world's best team. Her name has become linked with the women's game the way Beyoncé's is with lemonade.

It is true that considerably fewer people may have witnessed her pugnacious batting than saw WG. It is also true that WG did not come close to the selfless energy that Heyhoe Flint expended in advocating for the game at a time when she was repeatedly told that "girls don't play cricket". This is a woman who, through sheer force of will, opened up an all but exclusively male game to the other half of the population – not just in the UK but around the world.



Rachael Heyhoe Flint in 1983, shortly after her retirement from cricket.
Photograph: Adrian Murrell/Allsport

Note, for instance, that MCC's announcement is timed to coincide with the anniversary of the first women's ODI at Lord's in 1976. By this point England had been playing international cricket for over 40 years – and MCC never let women anywhere near its turf until the dogged Heyhoe Flint got after it.

She fought for fairness and equality without grudge or bitterness and with a consuming passion for the game that included the institutions that attempted to sideline her (it is a beautiful truth that her ashes were scattered on the Lord's outfield). "She loved serving," says her son Ben. "She loved a project and she wanted to sink her teeth into things that stood up for the women's game. She just gave so much time to everything without any real need for compensation ... Dad would always ask her, are you getting paid for any of this?" The answer, of course, was no. It is thanks only to Heyhoe Flint's trailblazing that the generations of cricketers she inspired – from Clare Connor to Charlotte Edwards to Heather Knight – have enjoyed the resources, respect and compensation that women's cricket never received in her own era.

As someone who was always more interested in getting things done than being applauded for it, Heyhoe Flint would probably be self-deprecating about this latest honour (last year's domestic women's tournament in England was also named after her). But the new Lord's gate can stand for more than just her achievements. It can also be a permanent reminder of the long roll-call of female players whose names and contributions to cricket remain scandalously unknown, and whose portraits have never been hung in the Long Room – from the brilliant opening pairing of Betty Snowball and Myrtle MacLagan, to the miserly bowling of Jo Chamberlain, to the all-round genius of Enid Bakewell.

[The Hundred: not cricket as we know it, but nothing for sceptics to fear](#)

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It is also a symbol of where women's sport has come from and where it is at now. That is why this moment belongs not to the culture warriors but to those who, like Heyhoe Flint herself, prefer to take the long view. Some will applaud the MCC and some will complain that it took it long enough but in truth the best way to memorialise English cricket's most important female figure has been under quiet and earnest discussion for a couple of years. Lord's may not be a place where things happen fast, but it can be place where they happen right. Far better a gate than a statue. Far better a place where cricket lovers will tell each other to meet, a favourite spot where a cricketing legend's name will live on, on the lips and in the texted instructions of friends and family as they join up with each other, excited for the game.

It is even a bit special that Rachael's gate leads first to the Compton stand, given that the dashing Middlesex and England batsman was her sporting hero. "She *really* fancied Denis Compton," says Ben. The design of the gates is still to be decided but the club says it is cracking on with it. And that is something its honouree would definitely approve of.

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Jared Kushner's hidden genius? To make terrible decisions – yet keep failing upwards

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



Donald Trump's son-in-law has decided to step away from politics and launch an investment firm. No doubt it will be a roaring success, whatever he does



Jared Kushner, when he was White House senior adviser, in Morocco.
Photograph: Shereen Talaat/Reuters

Jared Kushner, when he was White House senior adviser, in Morocco.
Photograph: Shereen Talaat/Reuters

Wed 4 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

Having selflessly served the public for four long years, Jared Kushner has decided it's time to step away from politics and apply his unique talents elsewhere. According to mysterious sources said to be "[familiar with the plan](#)", Kushner is preparing to launch a Miami-based investment firm called Affinity Partners. The exact nature of the firm is unclear; however, it will reportedly have an office in Israel, which will pursue investments connecting Israel's economy with India, north Africa and the Gulf. Now that he has oh-so-successfully made peace in the Middle East, Kushner appears to have decided he deserves to make a little profit.

It must have been hard for Kushner, who former ambassador Nikki Haley [once described](#) as a "hidden genius that no one understands", to give up his political career. Still, the decision was probably made easier by the fact that said "career" was simply a cushy "senior adviser" job with his father-in-law, and that ended when Donald Trump lost the election. Since then, Kushner and his wife, Ivanka, have been spending their days scooping up [Miami](#)

mansions. One presumes the pair haven't exactly been inundated with invitations to join the Biden White House, so the fact that the likes of Reuters are running headlines announcing Kushner is "to leave politics" is quite the PR victory on his part.

That's not Kushner's only victory. While he might have the charisma of a soggy tissue, Mr Ivanka Trump seems to have a knack for failing upwards. In 2007, for example, a 26-year-old Kushner urged his family's real estate company to pay a then-record \$1.8bn to purchase 666 Fifth Avenue, a skyscraper in Manhattan. This turned out to be a terrible decision. It might have had devastating financial consequences for the Kushner family had it not been for a sudden stroke of luck: in 2018, in the middle of Trump's presidency, a Canadian asset-management company, Brookfield Asset Management, agreed to take a 99-year lease on the building, paying a huge amount of rent upfront. Funnily enough, the Qatar Investment Authority was a major investor in Brookfield and, at the time, Kushner was backing a blockade on the Gulf kingdom. This was all a complete coincidence, and there was no intention of persuading Kushner to reverse his support for the blockade, Qatar has stressed. And, to be fair, the blockade wasn't lifted until this year. Still, if Kushner keeps running into coincidences like that one imagines his investment firm will do very well indeed.

- Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist
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Paying people \$300 to get vaccinated? How crude – how grubby – how very unAustralian

[First Dog on the Moon](#)



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Wed 4 Aug 2021 03.17 EDT

First Dog on ... mixed messages!

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Nils Pratley on financeBP

Future BP dividend hikes will test investor commitment to its green plan

Nils Pratley



If the price of oil rises further, the firm's move away from oil and gas output will fuel doubts

- BP raises dividend and unveils share buyback



The BP logo. Photograph: Aleksander Kalka/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

The BP logo. Photograph: Aleksander Kalka/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 3 Aug 2021 15.01 EDT

It's hard to keep up with oil companies' dividend policies. One minute they're slashing payments to shareholders in the face of a pandemic that, supposedly, had permanently lowered the outlook for oil prices. The next they're saying the coast is clear and divis can rise again.

Shell last week provided a classic example of this stop-start approach when, having cut by two-thirds last year, it announced a 38% increase. [BP offered a less chaotic picture on Tuesday but the basic plot was similar.](#) Last year's halving of the divi was followed by a 4% increase, rather than the previously flagged zero.

BP also threw in a promise that the same rate of annual increase can be maintained all the way to 2025 as long as a barrel of Brent fetches around \$60. If it does, [BP](#) will aim for \$1bn of share buybacks a quarter, which, at the current valuation, equates to buying in 5% of the equity every year.

"What you're seeing around the dividend is really a story of confidence," declared Bernard Looney, BP's chief executive. Well, up to a point. Yes, part

of the story is increased confidence that oil prices (currently just above \$70) won't collapse again. But the other half of the tale is the quiet rebellion among shareholders over last year's divi treatment. The investors, even as they say they're up for "transitioning" to a lower-carbon future, also want to see the cash, in their pockets, from today's oil production.

At \$60 or \$70 a barrel, the script roughly works. Shareholders, fed with short-term divis, are more likely to overcome their doubts about the long-term financial returns that can be generated by being a latecomer to the business of investing in solar and offshore wind projects.

One wonders, though, what would happen if the oil price goes much higher. At what point would Looney come under pressure to rethink his plan to cut oil and gas output by 40% by 2030 or to tone down the renewables budget? He has definitely won more supporters for his strategy over the past year – no question. But shareholders' thirst for dividends is still more obvious than their backing for long-term green projects.

Better to travel than arrive

On and off, [Smiths Group](#) has been trying to sell its medical division for about a decade in the interests of simplifying the broadly drawn FTSE 100 industrial company. The big day finally arrived on Monday after the London market had closed – a disposal to US private equity firm TA Associates at an enterprise value of £1.7bn. Cue a 10% plunge in Smiths' share price as investors reacted on Tuesday. Call it a severe case of it being better to travel than arrive.

There were two problems with the sale in investors' eyes. First, the price is about £300m shy of expectations. Second, Smiths is keeping a 30% stake, rather than selling the lot, so an interest in medical equipment such as ventilators and single-use devices will be hanging around.

"We sense relief from management that this deal has been announced, rather than this being a good outcome," said Jefferies' analyst politely.

Paul Keel, chief executive only since May, can't be blamed for the underwhelming terms since every interested party has had years to declare

itself. But his upcoming strategic rejig, designed to juice up growth within the rest of Smiths' mechanical seals-to-airport-scanners portfolio, now needs to create a buzz. The exit of the medical division was meant to provoke a reappraisal of an unfashionable conglomerate. It hasn't yet.

And here's my Tencent ...

Another day, another fall in the share price of a major Chinese company on the receiving end of a rebuke from Beijing, or, in this case, its state-owned media. [A condemnation of computer games as “spiritual opium”](#) was quickly followed by Tencent announcing restrictions on how long children can play its online games. In the end, the fall in the company's share price was only 6%.

In other sectors, Beijing's crackdown has been felt more keenly. Tech companies are in the spotlight on data. Private tutoring firms, sporting New York listings at previously fancy valuations, have been told to run not-for-profit models. And property firms have been told that houses are not for speculating.

The common theme, says Neil Campling at Mirabaud Research, is that “social inequality is being stamped on”. He's probably right. The crackdown is not as arbitrary as it may look. But, until that narrative becomes absolutely clear, by rights everything Chinese should carry at a discount for political risk. After a lively couple of months, that's almost today's position.

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A Trump bombshell quietly dropped last week. And it should shock us all

[Robert Reich](#)



A newly released memo shows that Trump told the acting attorney general: ‘Just say the election was corrupt [and] leave the rest to me and the [Republican] congressmen’



‘Make no mistake: this was an attempted coup.’ Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

‘Make no mistake: this was an attempted coup.’ Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

Tue 3 Aug 2021 06.20 EDT

We’ve become so inured to Donald Trump’s proto-fascism that we barely blink an eye when we learn that he tried to manipulate the 2020 election. Yet the most recent revelation should frighten every American to their core.

[Republicans will defend their Caesar but new revelations show Trump’s true threat | Lloyd Green](#)

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On Friday, the House oversight committee [released](#) notes of a 27 December telephone call from Trump to then acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen, in which Trump told Rosen: “Just say the election was corrupt + leave the rest to me and the R congressmen.” The notes were taken by Richard Donoghue, Rosen’s deputy, who was also on the call.

The release of these notes has barely made a stir. The weekend news was filled with more immediate things – infrastructure! The Delta strain!

Inflation! Wildfires! In light of everything else going on, Trump's bizarre efforts in the last weeks of his presidency seem wearily irrelevant. Didn't we already know how desperate he was?

In a word, no. This revelation is hugely important.

Rosen obviously rejected Trump's request. But what if Rosen had obeyed Trump and said to the American public that the election was corrupt – and then “left the rest” to Trump and the Republican congressmen? What would Trump's and the Republicans' next moves have been? And which Republican congressmen were in cahoots with Trump in this attempted coup d'état?

Make no mistake: this was an attempted coup.

Trump knew it. Just weeks earlier, then attorney general William Barr said the justice department had found no evidence of widespread fraud that could have overturned the results.

And a few days after Trump's call to Rosen – on 2 January – Trump told Brad Raffensperger, Georgia's secretary of state, to “find” votes to change the election outcome. He berated Raffensperger for not doing more to overturn the election.

Emails released last month also show that Trump and his allies in the last weeks of his presidency pressured the justice department to investigate totally unsubstantiated claims of widespread election fraud – forwarding them conspiracy theories and even a draft legal brief they hoped would be filed with the supreme court.

Some people, especially Republican officeholders, believe we should simply forget these sordid details. We must not.

For the first time in the history of the United States we did not have a peaceful transition of power. For the first time in American history, a president refused – still refuses – to concede, and continues to claim, with no basis in fact, that the election was “stolen” from him. For the first time in history, a president actively plotted a coup.

It would have been bad enough were Trump a mere crackpot acting on his own pathetic stage – a would-be dictator who accidentally became president and then, when he lost re-election, went bonkers – after which he was swept into the dustbin of history.

We might then merely regret this temporary lapse in American presidential history. At best, Trump would be seen as a fool and the whole affair an embarrassment to the country.

But Trump was no accident and he's not in any dustbin. He has turned one of America's two major parties into his own cult. He has cast the major political division in the US as a clash between those who believe him about the 2020 election and those who do not. He has emboldened state Republicans to execute the most brazen attack on voting rights since Jim Crow. Most Republican senators and representatives dare not cross him. Some of his followers continue to threaten violence against the government. By all accounts, he is running for president again in 2024.

Donald Trump's proto-fascism poses the largest internal threat to American democracy since the civil war.

What to do about it? Fight it, and the sooner the better.

This final revelation – Trump's 27 December call to the acting attorney general in which he pleads "Just say the election was corrupt + leave the rest to me" – should trigger section 3 of the 14th amendment, which bars anyone from holding office who "engaged in insurrection" against the US. The current attorney general of the United States, Merrick Garland, should issue an advisory opinion clearly stating this. If Trump wants to take it to the supreme court, fine.

- Robert Reich, a former US secretary of labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of [Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few](#) and [The Common Good](#). His new book, [The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It](#), is out now. He is a columnist for The Guardian US
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[United Arab Emirates](#)

Suspected tanker hijacking off UAE coast is over, says British military

Armed group has left the Panama-registered Asphalt Princess, says British navy, after initial reports Iranian-backed forces had raided vessel



The incident, reported by the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, comes after an attack on the Mercer Street tanker (pictured) off the coast of Oman last week. Photograph: Ali Haider/EPA

The incident, reported by the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, comes after an attack on the Mercer Street tanker (pictured) off the coast of Oman last week. Photograph: Ali Haider/EPA

Peter Beaumont and agencies

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.58 EDT

A group of armed men who boarded a tanker off the coast of the [United Arab Emirates](#) in the Gulf of Oman have left the targeted ship, the British navy has said without elaborating.

The notice on Wednesday came after the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) warned of a "potential hijack" under unclear circumstances underway the night before.

The UKMTO reported that the "incident [is] complete". It did not provide further details.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the attempted ship hijack, or what ship was targeted. Shipping authority Lloyd's List and maritime intelligence firm Dryad Global had both identified the seized vessel as Panama-flagged asphalt tanker Asphalt Princess.

The vessel's owner, listed as Emirati free zone-based Glory International, could not immediately be reached for comment.

The event unfolded amid heightened tensions between Iran and the west over Tehran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers and as commercial shipping in the region has found itself caught in the crosshairs. Most recently, the US, UK and Israel have blamed Iran for a [drone attack on an oil tanker](#) off the coast of Oman that killed two people. Iran has denied involvement.

A number of maritime security sources had suggested that Iranian-backed forces were suspected in an incident that remains clouded in uncertainty.

In a statement on Tuesday, the UK Foreign Office said it was "urgently investigating an incident on a vessel off the UAE coast". A spokesperson for the US state department said it was "too early to offer a judgment" on the incident.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards denied that the country's forces or allies were involved, saying the incident was a pretext for "hostile action" against Tehran, Iranian state television said on its website.

“According to information from security sources, Iran’s armed forces and all branches of the Islamic Resistance in the Middle East have nothing to do with the incident in the Gulf of [Oman](#),” the Guards said in a statement carried by the website.

The statement said the incident was an attempt by western countries and [Israel](#) “to prepare the public opinion of the international community for hostile action against the honourable nation of Iran”.

[Map](#)

Iran’s foreign ministry said reports of security incidents involving several ships near the UAE coast on Tuesday were “suspicious” and warned against any effort to create a “false atmosphere” against Tehran.

“The reports on the occurrence of successive security incidents for ships in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman is completely suspicious,” a ministry website quoted spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh as saying, adding: “Iran’s naval forces are ready for help and rescue in the region.”

First intimations of an incident emerged on Tuesday afternoon when a warning notice was issued by the British military’s UKMTO, which notified ships that “an incident is currently under way” – later upgraded to a “potential hijacking”.

An Oman Royal Air Force Airbus C-295MPA, a maritime patrol aircraft, was flying over the area, according to data from Flightradar24.com.

The initial warning emerged amid contradictory claims in different local media that up to four ships had reported issues. Four oil tankers announced around the same time via their automatic identification system trackers that they were “not under command”, according to MarineTraffic.com.

It was not clear, however, of the significance of those alerts or even if they were related, with one of the ships later moving again.

The US military’s Middle East-based Fifth Fleet and the British defence

ministry did not immediately return calls for comment. The Emirati government did not immediately acknowledge the incident.

The event comes just days after a drone struck an oil tanker linked to an Israeli billionaire off the coast of Oman, killing two crew members. On Monday, Iran said it would respond to any threat against its security after the United States, Israel and Britain blamed Tehran for the attack, which marked the first known assault to have killed civilians in the years-long shadow war targeting commercial vessels in the region.

Iran denied any role in the incident, though Tehran and its allied militias have used similar “suicide” drones in attacks previously. Israel, the US and UK vowed a “collective response” to the attack, without elaborating.

The UKMTO warning notice, based on a third-party source, advised vessels to exercise extreme caution in the area, about 61 nautical miles east of Fujairah.

The UKMTO was set up by the Royal Navy in 2001 initially to coordinate and exchange information with merchant traffic in the Arabian Sea to help counter Somali piracy.

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Illegally sterilised Czech women to be offered compensation

Hundreds of mostly Roma women were threatened, tricked or bribed into being sterilised until 2012



Ten Roma women, including Elena Gorolová, right, who was sterilised aged 21, protesting at Ostrava hospital last year over the illegal sterilisations. Their campaign for redress has lasted 20 years. Photograph: Vladimir Prycek/CTK/Alamy

Ten Roma women, including Elena Gorolová, right, who was sterilised aged 21, protesting at Ostrava hospital last year over the illegal sterilisations. Their campaign for redress has lasted 20 years. Photograph: Vladimir Prycek/CTK/Alamy

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[Anna Koslerova](#)

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.30 EDT

Women sterilised without their consent are to be offered compensation in the [Czech Republic](#) after President Miloš Zeman signed a bill into law this week.

The women, [most of whom were Roma](#), will be awarded 300,000 Czech crowns (£10,000) from the government as compensation.

Gwendolyn Albert, a human rights activist who was one of those campaigning for the change, said: “This means the wrongdoing committed against all who have been sterilised without their informed consent is acknowledged and can be redressed.”

Social workers used incentives and threats to force women to undergo the procedure from 1966 until 2012. No one knows how many women were affected, but campaigners believe there were several hundred victims.

The incentive programme ended with the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, but women in labour continued to be misled into unwittingly

signing consent forms before caesarean births – or in some cases were not told that they had been sterilised after the delivery. Others were misled into believing it had been a “life-saving” procedure. It was not until 2012 that Czech law was changed to require a cooling-off period between a patient requesting sterilisation and it being carried out.

The Czech Republic’s first-ever public defender of rights, or ombudsman, collected more than 80 testimonies regarding sterilisations for which the consent had been invalid. In 2005 the ombudsman’s [final statement](#) was published; assessing the health ministry’s response to the cases, it recommended that compensation be awarded.

The Czech health ministry will administer the compensation claims, although it has yet to announce when the process will begin. Victims who can demonstrate that they received benefits during the pre-1990 era for undergoing the procedure will be eligible for compensation on that basis. Those sterilised after 1990 will be asked to describe what happened to them and to support their claims as best they can.

For [Elena Gorolová](#), 51, a social worker from Ostrava who was sterilised at the age of 21, the move marks a historic win.

“We fought long and hard to win this battle; some of the women are now old, while others have passed away. I am glad they will get to see the light of justice,” she told the Guardian.

Barbora Cernusakova, from Amnesty International, said the compensation was a crucial step towards ensuring the right to redress for those who suffered.

“We hope that the adoption of the compensation bill will send a message to other countries in the region, in particular Slovakia, which has yet to adopt a similar compensation mechanism,” said Cernusakova.

['I always wanted a girl': scandal of Czech Roma forcibly sterilised](#)
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She warned that compensation should not end the discussion of racism towards Roma people in the Czech Republic, noting that Roma children faced discrimination in education and were often segregated into special schools with a more limited curriculum. Roma also faced discrimination in employment and housing, she said.

“Addressing these forms of human rights violations would require a strong commitment on the level of the central government and the local authorities, and an acknowledgment that Roma are equal citizens whose rights must be protected,” said Cernusakova.

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[Andrew Cuomo](#)

Biden calls on Cuomo to quit after damning sexual harassment report

- New York governor accused of harassment by 11 women
- President leads calls from both parties for Cuomo's resignation

01:07

Biden calls on Andrew Cuomo to resign after sexual harassment report – video

*[David Smith](#) in Washington and agencies
[@smithinamerica](#)*

Tue 3 Aug 2021 17.20 EDT

Joe Biden has led calls from both parties for New York governor [Andrew Cuomo](#) to resign after an investigation found he had sexually harassed 11 women.

[Biden calls on Cuomo to resign after report corroborates harassment allegations – live](#)

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New York's attorney general Letitia James [unveiled the results](#) of an investigation on Tuesday that showed Cuomo engaged in unwanted groping, kissing and hugging and made inappropriate comments to multiple women.

"I think he should resign," the president told reporters at the White House hours after the results of the investigation were published.

“I understand that the state legislature may decide to impeach. I don’t know that for a fact. I’ve not read all that data.”

Asked about Cuomo’s attempt to defend himself by using an image in which he is making physical contact with Biden himself, the president said: “Look, I’m not going to flyspeck this. I am sure there were some embraces that were totally innocent, but apparently the attorney general decided there were things that weren’t.”

He acknowledged: “I’ve not read the report. I don’t know the detail of it. All I know is the end result.”

Earlier on Tuesday, the White House said the findings were “abhorrent”.

“I don’t know that anyone could have watched this morning and not found the allegations to be abhorrent. I know I certainly did,” White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters later on Tuesday.

Biden had previously said Cuomo should resign if the allegations were shown by an investigation to be true.

Biden’s comments came after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi also called on Cuomo to resign, as did several New York [Democrats](#) – including both the state’s US senators, Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, as well as Congressmen Hakeem Jeffries and Mondaire Jones.

In her statement, Pelosi said a thorough investigation had been concluded. She said: “As always, I commend the women who came forward to speak their truth. Recognizing his love of New York and the respect for the office he holds, I call upon the Governor to resign.”

Schumer and Gillibrand issued a joint statement that called the report “profoundly disturbing”.

It added: “No elected official is above the law. The people of New York deserve better leadership in the governor’s office. We continue to believe that the governor should resign.”

Bill de Blasio, the mayor of New York City and fellow Democrat but longtime political foe of the governor, [said](#): “I’ll state the obvious: the summary you just gave represents behaviour that’s unacceptable.

“Unacceptable in anyone, let alone a public servant. I’ve be very clear about that fact that what we’ve seen is disqualifying.”

De Blasio’s all-but certain successor, the Democratic mayoral candidate Eric Adams, also pulled no punches and called for Cuomo to be impeached if he did not step down. Meanwhile, Cuomo’s own deputy, the New York lieutenant governor, Kathy Hochul, also called for him to resign, calling his behavior “repulsive” and “unlawful”.

“I believe these brave women and admire their courage coming forward. No one is above the law,” she said.

Cuomo – who has long had the backing of New York’s labor movement – also lost a major union supporter. In a statement, 32BJ-SEIU president Kyle Bragg said Cuomo needed to go.

He said: “Creating work environments where sexual harassment is not tolerated is nota matter of politics, but principle, from which no one should be exempted. We urge the governor to resign and to take responsibility for his well-documented actions and how they have hurt women.”

Republicans, too, seized on the findings. Congresswoman Elise Stefanik of New York, the highest ranking Republican woman in the House of Representatives, said: “No one is above the law and today justice must be served. Governor Cuomo must resign and be arrested immediately. President [Joe Biden](#) must immediately call for Cuomo’s resignation.”

Cuomo released a [defiant video address](#) on Tuesday, insisting “that I never touched anyone inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances” and making clear that he still has no intention of stepping down.

Cuomo, the son of three-term New York governor [Mario Cuomo](#), became a political star through televised daily briefings during the early months of the

pandemic but was tarnished by accusations that he misreported the numbers of deaths in nursing homes.

He faced calls to quit last year when two former aides accused him of sexually harassing them in the workplace and several more women then came forward with accusations of misconduct, prompting James's five-month investigation.

Reuters contributed to this report

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[Andrew Cuomo](#)

Andrew Cuomo sexual harassment: the key testimony from the report

Eleven women have accused the New York governor of harassment – and investigators say their accounts have been corroborated



Andrew Cuomo in New York City in June. The investigators interviewed 179 witnesses, 41 of whom testified under oath, and obtained ‘thousands’ of documents as evidence. Photograph: Mary Altaffer/AP

Andrew Cuomo in New York City in June. The investigators interviewed 179 witnesses, 41 of whom testified under oath, and obtained ‘thousands’ of documents as evidence. Photograph: Mary Altaffer/AP

[Lauren Aratani](#)

Tue 3 Aug 2021 16.18 EDT

Months after New York governor Andrew Cuomo denied multiple allegations of sexual harassment, the New York attorney general's office released a [165-page report](#) on Tuesday that corroborates the allegations that made public over the last year.

['This is not who I am': Cuomo issues denial after investigation finds he sexually harassed women – live](#)

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The report details the allegations from 11 women. The investigators interviewed 179 witnesses, 41 of whom testified under oath, and obtained “thousands” of documents as evidence.

Nine of the 11 women are current or former employees of the state government. Many share similar stories of fielding inappropriate questions from the governor and being subject to unwanted touching in his presence.

While the report included testimony from women who had brief, unsettling encounters with the governor, investigators also talked to women who endured years of unwanted behavior while working under the governor.

Below are their key accounts, which investigators say have been corroborated by interviews with witnesses and documents.

Lindsey Boylan

Boylan, a former executive at the Empire State Development Corporation (ESD) and deputy secretary for economic development, was the first woman to come out with allegations against Cuomo in December.

The report said investigators were able to corroborate Boylan’s public allegations that she experienced multiple incidents of inappropriate touching and comments while working with Cuomo. Boylan joined the ESD in 2015 and climbed the ranks of the agency until she resigned in 2018.

According to the report, Cuomo frequently commented on Boylan’s appearances and casually touched her waist, legs and back. Cuomo told

Boylan she looked like a former girlfriend and sometimes called her by that girlfriend's name.

Boylan described an incident where, after a one-on-one meeting with the governor, she walked by him to leave and he stepped toward her and kissed her on the lips. The incidents were "deeply humiliating", Boylan told investigators.

"I think a lot of people are like: of course this happened to young women who have no power. Well, I was really senior, and I had worked my whole life to get to a point where I would be taken seriously, and I wasn't being taken seriously," she said. "I worked so hard to be a doll for the governor of New York."

The report also described retaliation against Boylan from the governor's office, including leaking to the press confidential internal documents that negatively portrayed Boylan as a bad employee. The governor and his office also circulated among employees an op-ed that was ultimately not published that disparaged Boylan.

Charlotte Bennett

Bennett, who worked for Cuomo as an executive assistant until last fall, was the second woman who went public with allegations against the governor in February. Like Boylan's allegations, investigators said in the report that they were able to corroborate the accusations Bennett had made public in the spring.

Bennett described multiple inappropriate comments Cuomo made to her while she was employed by his office. Initially, she described seeing Cuomo as a father figure but later saw their interactions as inappropriate as he started asking her personal questions and making uncomfortable comments.

She described a series of conversations that took place over two days in January last year. Cuomo complained to Bennett about how long it had been since he hugged anyone. Bennett said that she told Cuomo that he could hug his daughters, but he said "not like that – like a real hug". He then said he was lonely and wanted a girlfriend.

The governor also asked Bennett if she had ever been with older men and whether she thought age was significant in relationships. The governor told Bennett – who was 25 at the time – that he would have a relationship with someone who was “22 and up”.

Bennett described feeling “really uncomfortable” but also described trying not to upset the governor.

Executive assistant no 1

A current aide to the governor, whose name has not been publicly released and who is referred to as “executive assistant no 1” in the report, told investigators of multiple incidents when Cuomo inappropriately touched her, along with comments and jokes he made about her personal life and relationships.

She described several incidents when the governor touched her, including close hugs where Cuomo would run his hands up and down her back. After the governor asked to take a selfie with her in December 2019, she felt Cuomo grab her butt and rub it. In November, after a hug, the governor slid his hand up her blouse and groped her breast.

The assistant said that the touching made her stressed and nervous to be around the governor, causing her physical reactions like hives on her neck. She told investigators that she believes the governor knew that she was nervous and was emboldened by it.

The assistant said that she originally planned to take the groping incident “to the grave” but became emotional after Cuomo said at a press conference in March that he had never “touched anyone inappropriately”.

Trooper no 1

The report included two incidents that had not previously been reported. One involved an anonymous employee at the state’s health department who said Cuomo made sexually suggestive comments while she was performing a live Covid-19 nasal test on the governor.

The second involves another anonymous employee, referred to as “trooper no 1” in the report, who, after first meeting Cuomo, was hired to join the state’s Protective Services Unit.

The trooper, who has been with the PSU since 2018, described multiple incidents when Cuomo touched her or made inappropriate comments.

[Biden to comment on Cuomo as White House calls report findings ‘abhorrent’](#)

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During the summer of 2019, Cuomo approached the trooper and kissed her on the cheek, she said.

Cuomo also discussed age differences in relationship with the trooper. He asked the trooper, who was in her late 20s, how old she was, and responded: “You’re too old for me.”

Kaitlin

The governor met Kaitlin, whose last name has not been made public, at a fundraiser event that was hosted by the lobbying firm she was working for at the time, the report says. At the event, she introduced herself to the governor, who ended up pulling her into a “dance pose” for a photograph and told her that he was going to have her work for the state.

Nine days later, Kaitlin received a voice message from the governor’s office inviting her to apply to a job, at the governor’s request. She told investigators she did not share her information with the governor’s office at the fundraising event nor did she express interest in a job to him or his staff at the event. She said the opportunity was presented to her because of her appearance.

Kaitlin took the job at the governor’s office, where Cuomo would frequently make comments about her appearance and the appearance of other women. He would comment on her makeup or clothing.

In one incident, Cuomo called Kaitlin into his office and asked her to look for car parts for him on eBay. She described feeling uncomfortable bending down to use his computer as she was in a dress and heels and Cuomo was directly behind her.

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[Garment workers](#)

Workers return to Bangladesh's garment factories despite record Covid deaths

Hundreds of thousands flock to cities as government allows manufacturers to reopen, with exporters citing fears Western brands would divert orders

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Thousands of people return to Dhaka using the Shimulia waterway in Bangladesh. Photograph: Md Manik/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Thousands of people return to Dhaka using the Shimulia waterway in Bangladesh. Photograph: Md Manik/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

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Agence France-Presse

Wed 4 Aug 2021 01.01 EDT

Hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi garment workers have returned to major cities, besieging train and bus stations after the government said export factories could reopen despite the deadly coronavirus wave.

Authorities had ordered factories, offices, transport and shops to close from 23 July to 5 August and confined people to their homes for a week, as [coronavirus infections and deaths hit record levels](#).

Larger factories that supply top brands in Europe and North America had been excluded from the nationwide lockdown order.

On Sunday the government gave the go ahead for the country's 4,500 garment factories, which employ more than four million people, to reopen, sparking a rush back to industrial cities this week.

Influential garment factory owners had warned of “catastrophic” consequences if orders for foreign brands were not completed on time.

Hundreds of thousands who had gone back to their villages to celebrate the Eid al-Adha festival and sit out the lockdown headed to Dhaka by train, bus and ferry. Others travelled on foot in the monsoon rain.

At the Shimulia ferry station, 45 miles south of Dhaka, tens of thousands of workers waited hours for boats to take them to the capital.

[Top fashion brands face legal challenge over garment workers' rights in Asia](#)

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Garment factory worker Mohammad Masum, 25, said he left his village before dawn, walked more than 20 miles and took rickshaws to get to the ferry port.

“Police stopped us at many checkpoints and the ferry was packed,” he said.

“It was a mad rush to get home when the lockdown was imposed and now we are in trouble again getting back to work,” said Jubayer Ahmad, another worker.

Bangladesh is one of the world’s largest garment exporters and the industry has become the foundation of the economy for the country of 166 million people.

Mohammad Hatem, vice-president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said up to \$3bn (£2.1bn) worth of export orders were at risk if factories had stayed closed.

“The brands would have diverted their orders to other countries,” said Hatem.

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Business live

Business

Chinese services activity accelerates, but Delta variant concerns remain – business live

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Wildlife

Bubonic plague in chipmunks forces closure of top Lake Tahoe sites

Disease can be spread by fleas that move between animals and humans but it is preventable and treatable



The US Forest Service announced the closures ‘based on positive plague tests’ in the rodent population around hiking areas. Photograph: Sam Judy/Alamy Stock Photo

The US Forest Service announced the closures ‘based on positive plague tests’ in the rodent population around hiking areas. Photograph: Sam Judy/Alamy Stock Photo

[Erin McCormick in San Francisco](#)

Tue 3 Aug 2021 15.58 EDT

Surrounded by fires, parched by drought, and shut down by the pandemic – residents of California’s scenic South Lake Tahoe thought they’d endured everything.

That was until this week, when the US Forest Service announced it was closing several popular sites after discovering bubonic plague in the chipmunk population.

The federal agency announced this week that “based on positive plague tests” in the rodent population around hiking areas, it would close the well-trafficked Taylor Creek Visitor Center and nearby Kiva Beach through Friday.

The closure includes some of the region’s most spectacular hiking spots, which meander through forested glades speckled with wildflowers and along a creek that leads to Lake Tahoe’s shore.

According to the forest service, plague can be spread by “squirrels, chipmunks and other wild rodents”, specifically by fleas that come in contact with infected animals and go on to bite humans.

As frightening as it sounds, plague in rodents at higher elevations is apparently not that rare, and a spokeswoman for the US Forest Service said spread to humans was easily preventable with a few precautions.

[Baked barnacles, scorched cherries: the disastrous impact of heatwaves on plants and animals](#)

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“Bubonic plague is naturally occurring in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and this region,” said Lisa Herron, a public affairs specialist for the agency’s Lake Tahoe basin management unit, which runs the closed facilities.

“It’s something that visitors need to take precautions about, but it’s not something that they need to worry about.”

She said keeping pets at home, or at least on leash and away from rodent burrows, was one important strategy. But visitors should also stay away from chipmunks and squirrels and report any that are acting strange or lethargic to rangers.

The federal agency's announcement on Facebook said "vector control" workers would complete "eradication treatments" in the area on Thursday in hopes of reopening the sites and the surrounding hiking areas by Friday.

Herron said this week's abatement efforts would not target the chipmunk populations themselves – but instead would try to wipe out their fleas.

Herron said the real danger of getting bubonic plague comes from the fleas that carry the disease. Regional authorities conduct regular tests, in which they trap the rodents, anesthetize them, comb them for fleas and then test the fleas for plague, she said. Once plague is detected, animal control workers will give the area the forest equivalent of a flea bath.

"What happens next is that the El Dorado county vector control will be dusting the burrows with a powder," she said.

Then there will be another round of trapping and testing and hopefully the visitor sites, which can draw several thousand visitors a day during the busy summer season, can be opened by this weekend, she said.

But plague in humans has been extremely rare in the area. Last year an avid walker from the South Lake Tahoe region tested positive, becoming the first case in five years, according to a [story in the Tahoe Daily Tribune](#).

Herron said if caught in time, plague in humans was now actually very treatable. Symptoms to watch for include sudden fever and chills, headache and muscle aches.

Local readers of the announcement seemed to take the closures in stride.

"Drought, plague, fires, and earthquakes. Just another week in California," said one poster, responding to the forest service's announcement on Facebook.

Others mused that it seems ironic that, at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic seems destined to run on for two years, the bubonic plague can now be wiped out in four days.

“Chipmunks and squirrels have had the plague for decades around the lake, nothing new,” said another Facebook user, responding to the latest [story in the Tahoe Daily Tribune](#). “Just tell them to stay home and wear a mask.”

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[Belarus](#)

UK is on your side, Boris Johnson tells Belarus opposition leader

PM gives full support to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and others' efforts to bring down Lukashenko regime

01:31

'We're on your side': Boris Johnson backs Belarus opposition leader – video

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent
@breeallegretti*

Tue 3 Aug 2021 10.27 EDT

The UK is on the side of Belarusian opposition leaders trying to bring down the tyrannical regime led by Alexander Lukashenko, [Boris Johnson](#) has said.

The prime minister gave his full support to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who is at the forefront of efforts to restore democracy in the face of a crackdown on civil society in the east European country.

Hosting Tsikhanouskaya in Downing Street hours after the head of a group that helps Belarusians fleeing persecution [was found dead in a park in Kyiv](#), the Ukraine capital, Johnson said the UK backed Tsikhanouskaya's struggle against severe human rights violations and the persecution of pro-democracy activists.

"We are very much on your side, very much in support of what you are doing. We are committed to supporting human rights and civil society in [Belarus](#)," he told her on Tuesday.

Tsikhanouskaya underlined the power of Johnson's declaration of support, saying it was "very important to understand that one of the most powerful countries in the world are supporting Belarus".

The prime minister replied: "We strongly support you, strongly support Belarus, the Belarusian people."

He also highlighted the speed at which the UK announced sanctions against Belarus, after the "hijacking" of a plane carrying another prominent anti-Lukashenko organiser, [Raman Pratasevich](#), who was taken into custody by the country's authorities [at the end of May](#) after a Ryanair flight was forced to land in Belarus.

No 10 said in a readout of a private meeting the pair held later that Johnson told Tsikhanouskaya both Britons and Belarusians "share fundamental values such as a belief in democracy, human rights and rule of law", and that the UK "stands in solidarity of the people of Belarus and will continue to take action to support them".

The significance of Johnson's support for Belarusian opposition leaders was intensified given the death of Vitaly Shishov, the head of Belarusian House in Ukraine. Shishov was reported missing by his partner on Monday after he did not return from a run and could not be reached on his mobile phone. Police said in a statement he had been found hanged in a park not far from where he lived, and that they had opened a murder investigation.

It also followed the recent effort by the [Belarus](#) Olympic athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya [to seek asylum](#). She received a humanitarian visa from Poland after she was threatened with being repatriated to Minsk over her criticism of Belarus Olympic team officials.

Outside No 10, Tsikhanouskaya told reporters it was too early to comment on Shishov's death, but said she would be undeterred in fighting for free and fair elections in Belarus.

"I understand you know, I can disappear at any moment," she said. "I understand this, but I should do what I am doing. I can't stop, because I feel

responsibility for the future of my country, the same as all those Belarusians felt fighting the government, feel their responsibility.

“But I know that even if I disappear one day, this movement will continue without me.”

Further announcements are expected from the UK government over the summer as it raises pressure on Belarus to curb the recent raids of rights groups, media organisations, charity groups and other non-governmental organisations. Lukashenko is seeking to stamp out even apolitical efforts by Belarusians to self-organise.

The Viasna human rights centre recently said the raids and arbitrary arrests were “just another instance of the crackdown against human rights defenders, civil society organisations and independent media that has been going on since the widely disputed presidential election in August 2020, when thousands of Belarusians took to the streets in mostly peaceful protests”.

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[Washington DC](#)

Officer dies after being stabbed outside Pentagon, officials say

- Suspect shot by law enforcement and dies at the scene
- Pentagon placed on temporary lockdown



The Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock
The Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Associated Press

Tue 3 Aug 2021 15.45 EDT

An officer died after being stabbed on Tuesday during a brief outbreak of violence at a transit station outside the Pentagon, on the outskirts of [Washington DC](#), and a suspect in the incident was shot by law enforcement and died at the scene, officials said.

The Pentagon, the headquarters of the US military, was temporarily placed on lockdown after gunshots were fired Tuesday morning near the entrance of the building.

A Pentagon police officer who was stabbed later died, according to officials who were not authorized to discuss the matter and spoke to the Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

More details about the violence were expected at a Pentagon news conference. The connection between the shooting and the stabbing of the officer was not immediately clear. The authorities did not immediately provide details or the sequence of events.

The incident occurred on a Metro bus platform that is part of the Pentagon transit center, according to the Pentagon Force Protection Agency. The facility is just steps from the distinctive Pentagon building, which is in Arlington County, [Virginia](#), just across the Potomac River from the US capital.

An Associated Press reporter near the building heard multiple gunshots, then a pause, then at least one additional shot. Another AP journalist heard police yelling “shooter”.

A Pentagon announcement said the facility was on lockdown due to “police activity”. The agency responsible for security at the building, the Pentagon Force Protection Agency, tweeted shortly before noon that the scene of the incident was secure. The lockdown was lifted except for the area around the crime scene.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Gen Mark Milley, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, were at the White House meeting with Joe Biden at the time of the shooting.

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Wildfires reach outskirts of Athens during scorching heatwave

Residents north of Greek capital evacuated, while 42C heat forces Acropolis to reduce opening hours



Police and residents in north Athens watch anxiously as a forest wildfire rages towards their suburb. Photograph: Yannis Kolesidis/EPA

Police and residents in north Athens watch anxiously as a forest wildfire rages towards their suburb. Photograph: Yannis Kolesidis/EPA

AP in Tatoi

Tue 3 Aug 2021 14.13 EDT

Thousands of people have fled their homes north of [Athens](#) after a forest wildfire reached residential areas. The hurried evacuations took place just as Greece grappled with its worst heatwave in decades.

The blaze sent a huge cloud of smoke over Athens and prompted multiple evacuations near Tatoi, 13 miles to the north. Residents left their homes in cars and on motorcycles, heading toward the capital in a blanket of smoke.

“It is a large fire and it will take a lot of work to get this under control,” the greater Athens regional governor, George Patoulis, told state-run ERT television. “The foliage is very dense in these areas and it is very dried out due to the heatwave, so the conditions are difficult.”

As the flames approached their homes, residents were seen running to their cars, faces covered with dampened cloths to protect them from the heavy smoke. One group stopped to help staff from a riding school push their horses into trucks to escape the flames.

With the heatwave scorching the eastern Mediterranean intensifying, temperatures reached 42C in parts of the Greek capital. Authorities described the temperatures as the worst in [Greece](#) since 1987.

The extreme weather has [fuelled deadly wildfires in Turkey and blazes in Italy, Greece and Albania](#). Wildfires also raged in other parts of Greece, prompting evacuations in a coastal area of the southern Peloponnese region as well as on the islands of Evia and Kos, authorities said.

[Anger in Turkey grows over government's handling of wildfires](#)

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The fires prompted the Greek basketball star Giannis Antetokounmpo to cancel celebrations planned in Athens for the NBA championship he won recently with the Milwaukee Bucks. “We hope there are no victims from these fires, and of course we will postpone [sic] today’s celebration,” he wrote in a tweet.

Earlier, authorities closed ancient sites, including the Acropolis, during afternoon hours. The site, which is normally open in summer from 8am to

8pm, will have reduced opening hours this Friday, closing between midday and 5pm.

Five water-dropping planes and five helicopters were involved in the firefighting effort near Athens, including a Beriev Be-200 amphibious aircraft leased from Russia. The blaze damaged electricity pylons, straining an electricity network already under pressure from the increased use of air conditioning.

The Greek fire service maintained an alert for most of the country for Tuesday and Wednesday, while public and some private services shifted operating hours to allow for afternoon closures.

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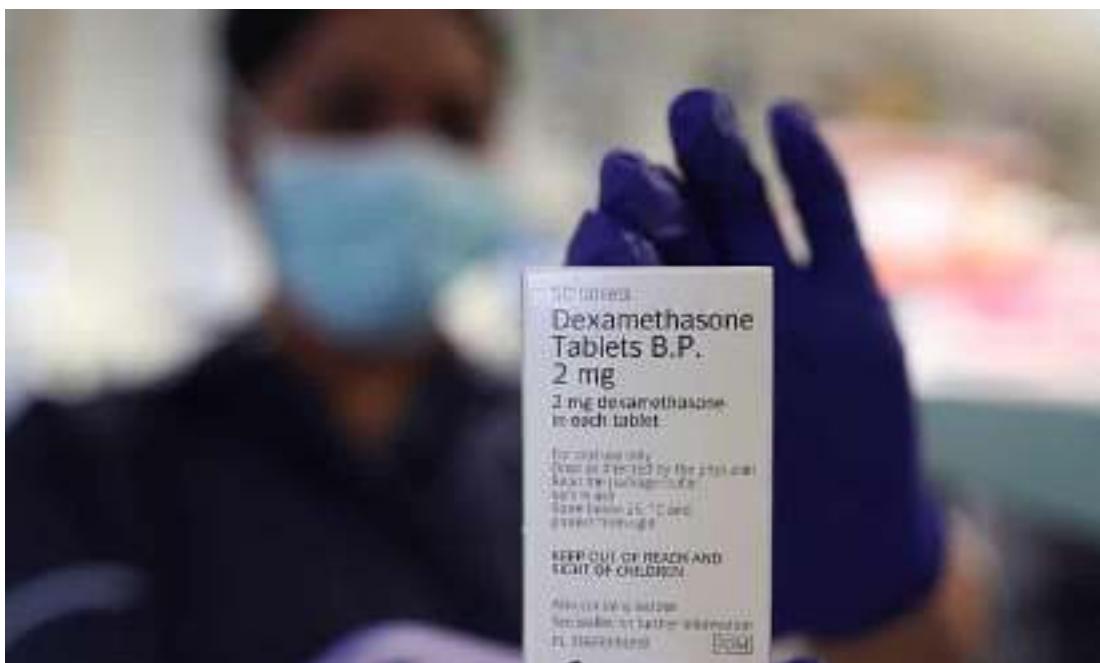
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Medical research

Covid drug could help reduce heavy menstrual bleeding

Trial suggests anti-inflammatory dexamethasone may offer welcome alternative to intra-uterine system



A staff member at a pharmacy in London holds a packet of the anti-inflammatory drug dexamethasone, which was hailed as a ground-breaking treatment for hospital patients seriously ill with Covid-19. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

A staff member at a pharmacy in London holds a packet of the anti-inflammatory drug dexamethasone, which was hailed as a ground-breaking treatment for hospital patients seriously ill with Covid-19. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Nicola Davis Science correspondent
@NicolaKSDavis

Tue 3 Aug 2021 12.35 EDT

Researchers hope a steroid that shot to prominence during the Covid pandemic may help reduce blood loss in those who experience heavy periods.

The cheap anti-inflammatory dexamethasone was discovered to improve survival rates among patients critically ill with Covid. It is also used for conditions including severe asthma and certain forms of arthritis.

Now researchers say a small trial suggests dexamethasone helps to reduce the amount of blood lost among those who experience heavy menstrual bleeding – an experience studies suggest may affect 20% to 52% of menstruating UK women.

“Heavy menstrual bleeding can impact lives hugely, especially for particular employments or life circumstances,” said Dr Pamela Warner, a co-author of the research at the University of Edinburgh.

Another concern, she added, was the effect iron depletion as a result of excess menstrual bleeding could have on general health, particularly in countries with reduced access to universal health services.

“The most common [treatment] now by far is the IUS [intra-uterine system], which is also a contraceptive,” she said. While this also protects against pregnancy, it does not suit all women, particularly those who don’t wish to use synthetic versions of reproductive hormones, while it is also unsuitable for those trying for a baby.

It is hoped dexamethasone could provide an alternative.

Writing in the journal EBioMedicine, Warner and colleagues report how they examined data from 97 women over the age of 18 recruited to the study. All experienced heavy menstrual bleeding, with an average of 50ml or more

blood lost across two measured periods, and regular periods that lasted 21 to 42 days.

The participants were randomised to either receive a placebo or one of six different doses of dexamethasone. These were taken twice a day for five days in the phase of their menstrual cycle before their period began. This was repeated for three menstrual cycles.

The results suggest that dexamethasone might reduce the volume of blood lost during periods, although the greatest and most clear-cut effect was seen for the highest dose of 1.8mg of dexamethasone a day. After taking into account the measured levels of menstrual blood loss at baseline, participants on this regime were estimated to have had an average reduction in menstrual blood loss of 25ml, compared with those on placebo – with the team 95% sure that the reduction is between 1ml and 49ml. The authors add those in this dosage group had a 19% average relative reduction in menstrual blood loss by volume compared with their individual baseline.

The team say the findings suggest dexamethasone could be a useful tool for tackling heavy menstrual bleeding.

“It is the first entirely new medical treatment for heavy menstrual bleeding for nearly 20 years,” said Warner, given that treatment launches in recent years have been developments of existing techniques.

She added that while three serious adverse events were recorded during the trial, none occurred among those who took dexamethasone, although there were some reports of mild potential side-effects such as dizziness, headache and sleep disturbance.

Warner said one option for future research may be to deliver the steroid via a self-applied vaginal pessary or other local method, which could mean a lower dose of dexamethasone would be needed – an approach that may also reduce side-effects.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) said it welcomed any research into heavy menstrual bleeding but raised concerns about the small sample size of this particular study and that the potential

long-term adverse effects were unknown. It called for a further trial with a more robust sample size.

However, Dr Annalise Weckesser, a medical anthropologist with expertise on gender and reproductive health at Birmingham City University, and who was not involved in the research, noted there is considerable overlap between those who live with heavy menstrual bleeding and those who live with endometriosis.

“For over two decades, those living with the highly disruptive and sometimes debilitating symptoms of heavy menstrual bleeding and/or endometriosis have reported that the limited treatments available are often ineffective or come with intolerable side-effects,” she said.

“While further research is needed on the use of dexamethasone to treat [heavy menstrual bleeding] given the dearth of treatment breakthroughs in women’s reproductive health generally, this is a welcome study that points to the possibility of a new non-hormonal and non-surgical treatment option.”

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Covid travel: minister defends plan for amber watchlist in England

Labour warns move will add to confusion over which countries are safe to visit during summer holidays

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A passenger at Heathrow. The airport's chief executive called for more countries to be added to the travel green list. Photograph: David Parry/PA

A passenger at Heathrow. The airport's chief executive called for more countries to be added to the travel green list. Photograph: David Parry/PA

Damien Gayle

@damiengayle

Mon 2 Aug 2021 05.24 EDT

A government minister has defended proposals for an amber watchlist for travel destinations, as Labour warned it would merely add to the confusion over which countries are safe to visit during the summer holidays.

Matt Warman, the minister for digital infrastructure, said the travel watchlist for England would provide people with more information so they could make “informed decisions”.

A country would be placed on such a list if there was a risk its coronavirus situation could cause it to be reclassified as red with little warning. Anyone entering the UK from a red-listed country must spend a period in hotel quarantine, at their own cost.

Speaking on Sky News on Monday, Warman said: “The point of the watchlist that you refer to is to try and give people a sense of the direction of travel that a country is going in, it’s to try and provide people with as much information as possible when they make those decisions about where they might want to go on holiday.

“Of course it is … great news to be opening up, that people who are coming back from amber-list countries don’t need to be quarantining, that’s a good sign of the direction that this country is going in thanks to the vaccination programme, but we do have to bear in mind that other countries are in a range of other positions.”

Responding to Warman’s comments, Anneliese Dodds, the Labour party chair, told Sky it appeared the government was again in “disarray” over the traffic-light system. She called on the government to be transparent about the data it uses to make decisions on foreign travel.

She told Times Radio: “We don’t want to see additional confusion and chaos here … We’ve been here before, we’ve been in this chaos before, and yet

government seems to be providing just more of the same, more confusion, more extra categories.

“What we’ve said for months as the Labour party is that the Conservative government need to be open and transparent, they need to be actually publishing the data that they’re taking their decisions on.

“They need to be also seeking that agreement around vaccine passports internationally that they’ve said they’re trying to do, but we’ve seen no evidence of progress there.

“If there’s more openness, I think that’s going to build trust in the system.

“The problem is, right now holidaymakers just don’t know who to believe and we’ve got … seem to have the chancellor briefing against the prime minister in the Sunday papers. That’s not building confidence, ultimately, in the system.”

Pressure has been building on Boris Johnson to redraw restrictions on foreign travel, with Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, writing to the prime minister to demand changes to the UK quarantine policy.

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In the letter, seen [by the Sunday Times](#), Sunak said UK border policy was “out of step with our international competitors”. He said there was little time to save the summer for tourism and hospitality sectors.

Also on Monday morning, the chief executive of Heathrow airport told the British government to make travel rules simple and called for [restrictions on travellers from France](#) to be eased.

“We just need to keep it simple,” John Holland-Kaye told Sky when asked about reports Britain may warn tourists against travel to Spain. He said the green list of countries, from which travellers do not have to self-isolate, should be expanded.

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Coronavirus

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[Angela Rayner](#)

Interview

Angela Rayner: ‘We don’t want to be an opposition, we want to be a government’

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Labour’s deputy leader opens up about being a carer, by-elections, and achieving a ‘cultural shift’ in the workplace



Angela Rayner announced this week that a Labour government would legislate to give companies an obligation to provide flexible conditions.
Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Angela Rayner announced this week that a Labour government would legislate to give companies an obligation to provide flexible conditions.
Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images



Mon 2 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Labour's deputy leader, [Angela Rayner](#), has said her own experience as a care worker helped to convince her more flexible working could be a "win-win" for staff and employers.

Speaking to the Guardian after announcing new policies last week on employment rights and flexible conditions, Rayner said she had helped negotiate family-friendly working when she was a trade union representative.

"We were frontline manual workers, delivering 7am till 10pm care in people's homes. We introduced a flexible rota that worked for the staff, and we saw productivity go up. The wellbeing of the staff, as well as the outcome for the service user, was they had the same staff going in – and sickness levels went significantly down as well, so it saved money for the employer. It's a win-win," she said.

“Of course, not everything can be achieved in every single workplace, but there are flexible options I believe in every workplace. If an employer looks after the employees, the employees will look after the employer, and it’s reciprocal,” she added.

Rayner announced this week that a [Labour](#) government would legislate to give companies an obligation to provide flexible conditions – including compressed hours, and accommodating caring responsibilities such as the school run – unless they can show it is unworkable.

It was part of a package of measures, drawn up with the shadow workers’ rights minister, Andy McDonald, that also included ensuring all employees gain rights from day one in a job.

The plans have been welcomed by the Corbynite campaign group Momentum, and helped to assuage fears among some in the party that Starmer would ditch the radical 2019 manifesto wholesale.

Speaking after a visit to a flexible working hub in Hull, Rayner said Labour’s aim was nothing less than to achieve a “cultural shift” in the workplace.

“It’s about changing the culture in our country. The whole emphasis to me is, yes there’s individual nuggets in here, but it’s about a cultural shift away from people being inflexible, and not looking for new and fresh ideas about how people can engage in the workplace,” she said.

Rayner shrugged off suggestions that she has been at loggerheads with [Keir Starmer](#) – or could even challenge him for the leadership, as some supporters had urged her to do before the Batley and Spen byelection earlier this month.

“Me and Keir have been working incredibly closely together since the start of the pandemic,” she said, comparing the day when they were both elected in the depths of the first lockdown to “an arranged marriage, almost, by telephone”.

“We bring different things to that leadership. And I think that works,” she said, calling them “yin and yang”.

Labour’s loss of the Hartlepool constituency in May sparked panic about Starmer’s prospects of leading Labour to a general election victory, with some MPs quietly casting around for a candidate who could gather the 40 signatures necessary to mount a challenge.

But his leadership has appeared more secure since the party held the Yorkshire seat of Batley and Spen.

Rayner said she and Starmer had different approaches. “You know, my style is more robust as people know: I’m more bombastic, in the way in which do things, I say it how I see it: and therefore I bring that freshness to the partnership.”

“Keir’s very forensic, he’s very intelligent. He’s very passionate about making sure that the country is a better place,” she said.

Rayner has spoken in the past about growing up in poverty, and becoming a carer for her mother, who struggled with mental illness, from the age of 10.

“I like to think I overshare and Keir undershares,” she said. “If you look at Keir’s background, it’s not dissimilar for mine: he looked after his mum, I looked after my mum,” she says. “Keir wasn’t from a privileged background”.

Challenged about a dip in Labour’s membership, Rayner said she was focused on voters. “Of course we want to attract people to be members of the Labour party, but what we need to do is we need to attract voters as well. And what we’re doing is we’re speaking to the country: we’re saying that actually we don’t want to be an opposition, we want to be a government,” she said.

Labour is in the process of laying off up to 90 staff via voluntary redundancies, as Starmer seeks to repair the party’s shattered finances after costly election battles and a string of legal cases.

The former shadow home secretary Diane Abbott criticised Labour this week for simultaneously seeking to hire staff on six-month contracts to handle a backlog of complaints against members.

“So Keir will make Britain the best place to work – unless you work for Labour,” Abbott tweeted. Rayner rejected that, highlighting the importance of ensuring the party is financially viable.

“We don’t want to be making staff redundant. It’s an awful situation but we can’t lose a general election, like we did, and then not look at our organisation,” she said.

And she insisted the complaints-handling staff will not be on zero-hours contracts, but were being hired on “a fixed-term contract for a specific piece of work”.

“I’m a trade unionist. I wouldn’t dream of doing anything that was detrimental to our workforce but you know, we have to be financially viable as an organisation,” she said.

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[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Simone Biles to compete in balance beam final, USA Gymnastics says

- USA Gymnastics confirms Biles will compete in beam final
- American star withdrew from team final due to mental health



Simone Biles removed herself from the team final on 27 July after a shaky performance on vault during the first rotation. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

Simone Biles removed herself from the team final on 27 July after a shaky performance on vault during the first rotation. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

[Tumaini Carayol](#) in Tokyo

Mon 2 Aug 2021 05.20 EDT

Simone Biles will compete again at the Tokyo Olympics. The six-time Olympic medallist will contest the balance beam final on Tuesday, the final day of artistic gymnastics in Tokyo.

USA [Gymnastics](#) announced on Monday that both she and her teammate, all-around champion Sunisa Lee, will take their places in the final. Its tweet read: “We are so excited to confirm that you will see two US athletes in the balance beam final tomorrow - Suni Lee AND Simone Biles!! Can’t wait to watch you both!”

[Brazil's Rebeca Andrade wins historic vault gold as USA's Skinner takes silver](#)

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Biles had arrived at the Olympics with the realistic chance of competing for five gold medals, but after losing herself in the air on her opening vault during the women's team final, she withdrew from that final in order to protect her mental health. Biles said that she would make a decision on her participation in each event by re-evaluating day by day and she proceeded to withdraw from the individual all-around, vault, uneven bars and floor finals.

We are so excited to confirm that you will see two U.S. athletes in the balance beam final tomorrow - Suni Lee AND Simone Biles!! Can't wait to watch you both!

— USA Gymnastics (@USAGym) [August 2, 2021](#)

Over the course of the week, further light was shed on Biles's struggles as she explained that she was suffering from the twisties, a mental block that affects many of the difficult skills she competes. "For anyone saying I quit, I didn't quit, my mind and body are simply not in sync as you can see here," Biles wrote on Instagram. "I don't think you realise how dangerous this is on a hard/competition surface."

Biles said that while previous mental blocks have primarily affected her on vault and floor routines, this time it was affecting her on all events and particularly on her twisting skills. On the balance beam, Biles normally attempts fewer twists than all other events and so she may feel most comfortable in that event. Her sole twisting skill is her high-difficulty full twisting double back dismount, which she could downgrade to a less difficult dismount if the skill remains a problem for her.

Since her withdrawal, Biles has said that she has spent time training at an unspecified location in Tokyo where she has been able to train her skills safely into a foam pit. During competition days, she has usually been the loudest voice in the arena, cheering her teammates and many gymnasts from other countries with whom she is friendly. They will now have the chance to support her in kind.

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Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Tokyo 2020: Hassan takes 5000m gold, GB weightlifting silver and more – as it happened

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Call to vaccinate younger Australians as data reveals they're hardest hit by Covid

‘We have been neglecting our young’: health data shows 20-39 year olds at severe risk of coronavirus infection



Australians aged in their 20s have suffered more Covid cases than any other age group, health department data reveals. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Australians aged in their 20s have suffered more Covid cases than any other age group, health department data reveals. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Josh Nicholas](#)

Mon 2 Aug 2021 05.08 EDT

Younger Australians have borne the brunt of the Covid pandemic with people aged in their 20s hit by more cases than any other age group, according to a *Guardian Australia* analysis of department of health data.

But, while the number of coronavirus cases was highest among those in their 20s, followed by those in their 30s and 40s, the severity of the illness was far worse among older Australians.

Australians aged over 80 had a disproportionately high number of cases and deaths, with most of these occurring during Victoria’s extended outbreak last

year.

['Health systems should be prepared': doctors brace for tsunami of long Covid](#)

[Read more](#)

Professor Marylouise McLaws, an epidemiologist at the University of NSW, says 20-39-year-olds have been at severe risk of infection throughout the pandemic.

“We have seen young people having 40% of the burden even before Delta. They are lower socioeconomic [status]. They often work in multiple jobs or live in crowded households because they either like it or they need to do that. So it’s not a surprise that 20-39 year olds are at an enormous risk,” McLaws said.

“And yet they have been neglected because [they] can’t get in for love or money to get a vaccine”

[Share of cases](#)

Those aged in their 20s and 30s have had a significantly higher percentage of Covid cases than would be expected given their share of the population.

On a per capita basis, Australians aged over 90 have had significantly more cases than any other age group.

Despite the case load skewing overwhelmingly younger, older Australians have borne the brunt of deaths. Those aged over 80 are a relatively small proportion of the Australian population, but more than 40% of deaths in the pandemic have been in the 80-89 age group.

[Covid Australia vaccine rollout tracker: total number of people and per cent vaccinated, daily vaccine doses and rate of progress](#)

[Read more](#)

[To date](#) only one person in their 20s has died. Five people in their 30s or 40s have died. These three age groups account for about 40% of the population.

Adjusting the number of cases and deaths to a rate per 100k population shows that those over 90 have been hit much harder than any other age group.

There have been more than 400 cases and 150 deaths per 100k people over the age of 90. For people in their 80s, the figures drop to almost 50 deaths and more than 150 cases per 100k people.

[Showing the cases and deaths per 100k population in each age group](#)

Data published by the health department [at the beginning of March last year](#) shows cases skewing slightly to older demographics. 50-59 year olds made up 20% of new cases at that time, with those in their 40s and 30 year olds accounting for 15% each. But this was likely biased by early infections in overseas travellers.

[Sydney Covid crisis could take months to recede if other outbreaks are anything to go by](#)

[Read more](#)

Most of the infections in Australians aged over 70 occurred [during Victoria's extended second wave last year](#). The number of Covid cases per 100k people aged over 80 jumped from 64 at the beginning of August 2020 to over 140 by month's end.

McLaws says many of the infections in older Australians were in aged care facilities, where residents were a “captive audience”.

“When you are looking at the older group it’s really confounded by the fact they were a captive audience, with hospital in the home. So they didn’t have a chance of escaping someone who was positive in the household. And that’s what we are seeing with Delta now.

“The biggest two categories of risk are not socialising anymore, they are workplace and households. And residential aged care facilities are households. They are just shared households.”

[New covid cases by age group](#)

By the beginning of November 2020, more than 390 people per 100k aged 90 or over had contracted Covid. But since then the proportions of infections in these age groups has largely remained stable – whether there is an outbreak or not.

Those over 60 were also prioritised early in the vaccine rollout.

Australians aged 40 and under have consistently made up around 60% of new infections every fortnight, according to the [fortnightly epidemiology reports](#) released by the department of health. But relatively few of these are aged under 10 – around 5% of all cases. This is less than half their proportion of the population.

The federal epidemiology reports do not include current data on the latest outbreak in Sydney. Data scraped from the department of health website by [Ken Tsang](#) shows those under 40 have continued to make up the majority of new cases over the past two months.

[Showing the number of new cases per week across Australia](#)

Most younger Australians have been ineligible for vaccines, unless they fall into a small number of jobs or have pre-existing medical conditions. [New South Wales](#) and Victoria have recently relaxed vaccine eligibility slightly, but many are still having trouble booking shots.

McLaws says the vaccine priority needs to change, given what we've seen in the community as well as overseas.

“The epidemiology is screaming to me that we have been neglecting our young. Apart from the fact that they are our next generation ... they are also at the greatest risk of transmitting. Just like carers in residential aged care facilities are the greatest risk of transmitting to our elderly,” McLaws says.

“They have to open up right now the vaccine to anybody that turns up. But give priority, have a special queue, for the 20 to 39 year olds.”

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NHS urged to redistribute near-expiry vaccines as take-up slows in young

Doctors across England raise alarm as 170,000 Moderna doses at risk of expiry within fortnight

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Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have a shelf-life of up to one month in the fridge, compared with the AstraZeneca vaccine which can last for up to six

months Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have a shelf-life of up to one month in the fridge, compared with the AstraZeneca vaccine which can last for up to six months Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

*[Jessica Elgot](#)
[@jessicaelgot](#)*

Sun 1 Aug 2021 10.00 EDT

The [NHS](#) is facing pressure to redistribute tens of thousands of vaccine doses nearing expiry as demand from younger adults drops.

An internal email seen by the Guardian warned of 170,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine at risk of expiry within the next fortnight, as doctors across England have raised alarm at the unpredictability of vaccine take-up among young people meaning more doses will go to waste.

The government is to unveil a raft of new initiatives to increase vaccine uptake among young people, including discounts on car-hailing companies such as Uber and Bolt, as well as the delivery service [Deliveroo](#).

[Roll up, roll up: UK circus offers vaccine as take-up slows in under-25s](#)

[Read more](#)

It is understood the NHS has managed to redistribute 40,000 of the spare Moderna jabs. However, concerns have been raised about the number of jabs wasted as uptake slows among younger people eligible for the Moderna and Pfizer jabs.

The Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation recommends an interval of eight to 12 weeks between doses, initially as a way to offer more people first doses because of limited supply, but studies have since shown that the larger gap could give longer protection.

One NHS doctor in the north-east, Dr Alison George, said colleagues had been forced to routinely discard Pfizer doses, rather than give second shots early to people who requested them. “We have very high rates of infection

here and the local hospital is already under significant pressure with some elective surgery cancelled,” the GP said.

“Wastage at this stage of unlocking is wholly unjustified and to turn young people away as well is, in my opinion, completely unforgivable.”

Dr Rosemary Leonard, an NHS GP, tweeted last week that doctors were keen to be able to give the jabs earlier to avoid wastage. “Please, please, could young people be allowed to get their vaccines earlier than eight weeks. Numerous colleagues telling me of 100s of doses being thrown away, yet ‘early requesters’ at clinics being turned down.”

“I’ve heard of one clinic having to bin 1,000 doses of Pfizer cos it had expired, yet turning people away for second dose.”

Leonard said that because GPs were mostly no longer running clinics, pop-up centres often had no discretion. “Unlike GP-led clinics, no one dares make commonsense decisions,” she tweeted.

Beccy Baird, a senior fellow at The King’s Fund, said it was getting more difficult to predict vaccine uptake.

“Uptake is getting lower as the cohorts get younger and matching the supply of vaccines to demand will get harder as demand becomes less predictable. This is made all the harder as the vaccines have a limited shelf life,” she said.

“Making sure that everyone who wants and needs a vaccine can access both doses at the right time, and at a convenient location, is a complex task on a huge scale and it’s testament to all those involved in the vaccine programme that so many people have already received both doses.

“In the early stages of the rollout, you could be confident that wherever vaccines were delivered there would be sufficient demand for them. Now that a majority of adults have been vaccinated, and with uptake getting lower as the cohorts become younger, demand for the vaccine is more unpredictable, making it harder to know exactly where the doses are needed.”

An NHS spokesperson said: “The NHS is continuing to encourage vaccine uptake among young people by jabbing at convenient locations and popular destinations, including Thorpe Park and Latitude festival as well as community hubs at places of worship and shopping centres.

[Uber and Deliveroo discounts to lure young people in UK to get Covid jab](#) [Read more](#)

“There is plenty of vaccine supply and everyone aged 18 or over is now eligible for a lifesaving Covid jab, which is why the NHS is urging people to come forward as soon as possible to protect themselves and their loved ones.”

Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are now mostly distributed to the under-40s, who cannot receive the AstraZeneca vaccine. Those vaccines have a shorter shelf life of up to one month in the fridge, compared with the AstraZeneca vaccine, which can last for up to six months.

Though Pfizer and Moderna doses can be administered at an interval of just three weeks, studies have shown that an eight- to 12-week interval can offer greater longer term immunity against Covid-19.

The UK is to distribute 9m doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to poorer countries from this week, though concerns have been [raised that those doses are also nearing expiry](#), putting pressure on developing countries’ healthcare systems to distribute the doses in time.

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China tests millions as Nanjing airport outbreak sees Covid cases surge

The country fights its most widespread outbreak in months with cases in more than a dozen provinces

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A health worker tests a woman for Covid-19 in China's Hunan province as cases spread following an outbreak at Nanjing airport in eastern Jiangsu province Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

A health worker tests a woman for Covid-19 in China's Hunan province as cases spread following an outbreak at Nanjing airport in eastern Jiangsu

province Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Agence France-Presse
Sun 1 Aug 2021 19.55 EDT

Chinese cities have rolled out mass testing of millions of people and imposed fresh travel restrictions as health authorities battle to contain the country's most widespread coronavirus outbreak in months.

China on Sunday reported 75 new coronavirus cases with 53 local transmissions, with a cluster linked to an eastern airport now reported to have spread to over 20 cities and more than a dozen provinces.

The outbreak is geographically the largest to hit China in several months after the country's successes in largely snuffing out the pandemic within its borders last year.

That record has been thrown into jeopardy after the fast-spreading Delta variant broke out at Nanjing airport in eastern Jiangsu province in July.

[City of Nanjing isolated as China fights worst Covid outbreak in months](#)
[Read more](#)

Authorities have now conducted three rounds of testing on the city's 9.2 million residents and placed hundreds of thousands under lockdown, in an effort to curb an outbreak Beijing has blamed on the highly contagious Delta variant and the peak tourist season.

They are also scrambling to track more than 5,000 people nationwide who attended a theatre festival in Zhangjiajie, a tourist city in Hunan province, which has locked down all 1.5 million residents and shut all tourist attractions after four visitors tested positive.

Health officials say the mini-outbreak in Zhangjiajie was sparked by travellers from Nanjing and has helped spread the disease to more than 20 cities.

“Zhangjiajie has now become the new ground zero for China’s epidemic spread,” virologist Zhong Nanshan told reporters on Saturday.

“We must cast the net wider when tracing close contacts of the Delta variant.”

On Sunday, Beijing reported three locally transmitted infections – a family living on the outskirts of the Chinese capital that had returned from Zhangjiajie, the local health bureau said.

Beijing has cut all rail, bus and air links with areas where coronavirus cases have been found.

The Chinese capital has also closed its doors to tourists during the peak summer holiday travel season and is only allowing “essential travellers” with a negative nucleic acid test to enter.

Fresh cases were also reported Sunday on Hainan island – another popular tourist destination – as well as Ningxia and Shandong provinces, authorities said.

The country is also battling a separate rise in cases in the flood-ravaged city of Zhengzhou in Henan province after two cleaners at a hospital treating coronavirus patients coming from abroad tested positive.

Thirty locally transmitted cases have been detected, with authorities Sunday ordering tests of all 10 million residents. The head of the city’s health commission has also been sacked.

And after reports that some people sickened in the latest cluster were vaccinated, health officials have said this was “normal” and [stressed the importance of vaccination](#) alongside strict measures.

“The Covid vaccine’s protection against the Delta variant may have somewhat declined, but the current vaccine still has a good preventative and protective effect against the Delta variant,” said Feng Zijian, virologist at the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention.

More than 1.65bn vaccine doses have so far been administered nationwide as of Saturday, Beijing's National Health Commission said. It does not provide figures on how many people have been fully vaccinated.

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Architecture

Does London really need a gigantic glowing orb the height of Big Ben?



Brash bauble ... an artist's impression of the proposed MSG Sphere.
Photograph: The Madison Square Garden Company

Brash bauble ... an artist's impression of the proposed MSG Sphere.
Photograph: The Madison Square Garden Company

The MSG Sphere, Madison Square Garden's proposed stadium will beam adverts into locals' faces all day – but critics are questioning the planning process



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

Mon 2 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

As planning applications go, it's certainly got balls. Or, to be precise, one massive ball. A gigantic glowing orb, as wide as the London Eye and almost as tall as [Big Ben](#), is planned to descend on Stratford, bulging on to the skyline like a great artificial sun, dazzling the East End with the power of 36m LEDs.

This is [the MSG Sphere](#), the latest live entertainment concept from New York's Madison Square Garden company, purveyors of high-octane razzmatazz since 1879. "The world's most famous arena" in Manhattan has hosted everyone from the Rolling Stones to Muhammad Ali [beneath its great circular roof](#); but, in London, they want to go one better. The sphere, they say, is designed for "the next generation of immersive experiences", featuring the biggest and highest-resolution screen in the world, an "infrasound haptic system" of vibrating floors, and "beamforming" audio technology to channel sound to every seat. But its most extreme, and controversial, feature is what's on the outside: the building's facade is a five-acre spherical TV screen, like Times Square rolled into a ball. It is set to glow 24 hours a day, covered with animated adverts for half the time,

flickering right outside people's bedroom windows.

"Our friends have joked that it will at least reduce our electricity bills," says Ceren Sonmez, who lives opposite the proposed site. "We'll never have to switch the lights on, day or night."



Blade Runner dystopia ... visuals made by AEG to show the future view from Legacy Tower. Photograph: AEG

Sonmez and her husband moved into a shared ownership flat on the third floor of Legacy Tower in Stratford in 2018, across the railway line from where the sphere will rise next to the Westfield shopping centre. On the day they picked up their keys, they found a leaflet on the doormat advertising a public consultation for the project nearby, so they ran straight over.

"We suggested it wasn't an appropriate development for a residential area," says Sonmez. "But the guy just said: 'If you don't like noise and crowds, you shouldn't have moved to Stratford.' I've lived in east London all my life and never imagined something like this would be built here. Nobody expects a gigantic ball of light to arrive on their doorstep, no matter where they live."

Except, perhaps, in Las Vegas. If the project looks like something airlifted

from Sin City, well, that's because it is. Despite the claim that the London sphere will be "like nothing you've ever experienced", MSG is currently [building an almost identical project](#) next to the Venetian resort in Vegas, set to open in 2023. Brainchild of MSG boss James Dolan, a major donor to Donald Trump's campaign, the \$1.8bn blob joins a fantasy land of fake canals and artificial skies. It makes a fitting addition to the world capital of glowing billboards, standing as the apogee of 360-degree advertising, the ultimate building-as-sign. It is the stuff of [Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's neon-soaked dreams](#).

You might argue that post-Olympics Stratford is the closest thing that London has to the anything-goes free-for-all of the Vegas Strip. Stratford High Street is now [lined with its own special gauntlet of tacky towers](#), some rainbow-hued by night, while the Olympic Park is no stranger to architectural whimsy. It is home to a velodrome shaped like a Pringle, a [swimming pool in the form of a chubby stingray](#), and an observation tower that looks like [a mangled rollercoaster](#). What better place to put a colossal pulsating orb, full of 21,500 concert-goers?

Right next door to the [60,000-capacity London Stadium](#) might not be the best place, for a start. The narrow corridors of Stratford station are often congested to breaking point and have [reportedly witnessed commuters being trampled](#). MSG insists it will work with the stadium to avoid event clashes "where practicably possible", but locals remain concerned. MSG have also committed to build a new entrance to Stratford station, which they say will help relieve added congestion, but campaigners argue that the concourse area is not sufficient to manage crowds exiting the sphere.

"We don't think Stratford residents should be guinea pigs for something this huge," says Lindsay Mace, a member of the [Stop MSG Sphere campaign group](#). "From the station overcrowding to increased traffic, noise and light pollution, it's both ridiculous and obscene that this thing is even being considered."

The immense globe has made a remarkable journey, from looking like an April Fools' Day prank to now seeming quite likely to happen. The London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), the mayoral body charged with

overseeing the fate of the Olympic park and its surroundings, has scheduled a planning committee date for September, where the result of [MSG's 3,000+ page application](#) will finally be decided. But how did it get this far?

The 1.9-hectare (4.7-acre) triangular site in question has mostly been ignored by the many Olympic legacy masterplans. It was always seen as an unpromising armpit around the back of Westfield's car park, hemmed in by railway lines, and vaguely allocated for "town centre uses which respect the existing character, scale and massing" in the current plan. The site was publicly owned by London & Continental Railways, and served as a coach park during the Olympics, before being sold to Westfield for £9m in 2015. The Australian mall owner had plans [for an indoor ski slope](#), enthusiastically backed by then-mayor Boris Johnson, but the idea was binned and the site sold on to MSG in 2017 for a whopping £60m.

How could a scrap of railway land have increased more than six times in value in two years, without planning permission being granted, nor a clawback mechanism put in place to capture some of that value for the public good? Was MSG given some kind of tacit assurance that their gargantuan sphere would be permitted, against the principles of the local plan?

Campaigners' suspicions were raised further when they realised that MSG's president of development and construction, Jayne McGivern, who has led the sphere project since 2018, was an LLDC board member from 2012 to 2016. A [freedom of information request revealed](#) that, between 2017 and 2019, there were 33 unminuted meetings between the legacy corporation and MSG's team, including regular private phone calls between McGivern and LLDC boss Lyn Garner.



Construction work on the Las Vegas Sphere. Photograph: Chase Stevens/AP

An LLDC spokesperson says: “Like all local planning authorities, LLDC regularly discusses major strategic development sites with landowners, as is standard practice, works proactively with applicants to discuss development proposals and tries to resolve issues with developments prior to formal submission. The level of engagement with the applicant and other stakeholders through public consultation is entirely in keeping with the scale and complexity of this particular application.” An MSG spokesperson agreed, insisting there has never been a conflict of interest and no prior assurances were given.

The anti-sphere campaign has not been without its controversies either. In 2019, it was revealed that the “Newham Action Group”, a vocal platform against the project, was an organisation [created by a PR firm on behalf of AEG](#), operator of the rival O2 Arena. The Greenwich concert venue has waged an elaborate war against MSG, hiring an army of PR agencies and planning lawyers to pick apart every detail of the application. Their arsenal includes surreal videos of what the view from Sonmez and her neighbours’ flats would look like if the sphere went ahead – a [permanent Blade Runner dystopia](#) of animated ads beamed through their windows.

If the project is approved, there will be plenty of uncharted territory to keep

the lawyers busy. “Excessive displays of Christmas lights have appeared before the courts in the past in neighbours’ disputes,” says Bryan Johnston, head of property litigation at Dentons, the law firm working for AEG. “This will be one almighty Christmas display, 365 days a year.” The right to light is a well established planning principle, but what about the right to darkness? MSG says it will put the sphere in “low luminance” mode from midnight to 6am in summer and 7am in winter – but that still means that, in the darker months, it will already be at its brightest before sunrise.

The sphere’s fate will be a litmus test of how democratic London’s decision-making process really is. Newham, the borough the site is in, is firmly against it. The council has objected on numerous grounds, from traffic and air quality to light pollution and employment. Neighbouring Hackney is also opposed, criticising the likely “harmful ecological impact” on Lee Valley to the north. But, like the Docklands Development Corporation which ushered in Canary Wharf in the 1980s, the largely unaccountable LLDC trumps local views. Of 12 members on the corporation’s planning committee, only five are elected local councillors. As MP for West Ham, Lyn Brown says: “Unelected members of the LLDC board and planning committee frequently outvote elected borough representatives and this has often resulted in development that fails to benefit local people. Permitting the sphere would be a betrayal of the Olympic legacy.” As the legacy corporation is soon set to be wound up, with planning powers reverting to the boroughs in 2024, is it right that they should be the arbiter of a project with such far-reaching consequences on the area?

Other opposition has been gradually diluted by a drip-feed of additional reports and mitigation strategies from MSG that purport to answer the concerns. Transport for London raised serious worries over station capacity and the danger of train drivers being distracted by the swirling LEDs, but now says it is “working constructively” so that the issues “can be effectively mitigated”. Network Rail’s objections have also been reduced. Critics point out that its chair, Sir Peter Hendy, also chairs the LLDC, and had unminuted meetings with MSG, though there is no suggestion of impropriety.

The LLDC’s decision will ultimately be referred to the Labour mayor of London, Sadiq Khan. He was enthusiastic about welcoming “another world-

class venue to the capital, to confirm London's position as a music powerhouse" when the sphere was announced in 2018; yet the following year, his planning officers' first report concluded that it did not comply with his own London Plan. He is in a bind. Will he side with the Labour borough and listen to the locals, or back his development corporation in the hope of using this brash bauble to buff the capital's post-Brexit brand?

This article was amended on 2 August 2021 to remove an incorrect suggestion in the subheading that the planning application was being fast-tracked; and to add further detail about station access

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Interview

Jessie Cave on body image, bereavement and being relentless: ‘I don’t have any secrets’

[Emine Saner](#)



‘I don’t have any secrets’ ... Jessie Cave in London last month. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

‘I don’t have any secrets’ ... Jessie Cave in London last month. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

The actor, comic and writer talks about her bestselling debut novel, the cruelty of costume fittings, how it felt to be in the Harry Potter franchise – and finding hope in small things



[@eminesaner](#)

Mon 2 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

As a compulsive diary writer – she has kept one since she was eight – Jessie Cave knows that, unless it gets written down, life gets forgotten. She is glad, then, that she wrote her debut novel, *Sunset*, because the way she felt at the time “would have just gone, and then you’re in a different place and you don’t remember”. This book, says Cave, was “absolutely the only thing I could write during that period”.

In March 2019, her younger brother Ben died in an accident aged 27. Her book was written in the aftermath, that manic feeling that sometimes comes with grief pushing her on. It went straight to No 1 on the Times’ bestseller list after being published in June. “I don’t know if I would have that energy now,” she says.

In *Sunset*, it is twentysomething Ruth who has to deal with destabilising grief after the shocking death of her older sister in an accident – their close bond is inspired by Cave’s relationship with her younger sister Bebe. “It was a complete outpour at the beginning,” she says of the first draft. “It was thrilling and cathartic to write someone else’s story and to have a different accident and a different set of family members and friends and situations. I

could come away from my own shit for a bit, my own sadness, and pretend. That's the luxury of creating: you can just forget for a bit." It isn't a depressing book – it is funny and a warm portrayal of sibling love. But, she adds, holding a cup of tea in a London cafe, "it did get really hard at points and I would have to take a step back from it".

Cave, 34, is best known for her role as Lavender Brown in the [Harry Potter](#) films – and she is about to star in an ITV2 comedy, Buffering – but in recent years she has created a successful career as a writer, comedian, performer, illustrator and podcaster (all this plus raising three small children).

She comes across as kooky and a bit dreamy – it is partly the Rapunzel-like hair, today piled on top of her head, and an eccentric approach to fashion, as if a creative child has dressed her – but she is sharp, clever, funny and driven, if prone to self-deprecation. "I constantly feel like a failure," she says. "I constantly worry about how I'm going to make money. I also have to prove that I'm working hard, because I hate the thought of someone thinking that I'm not grafting for what I've got. So I've always been quite relentless in generating stuff, because I need ..." She pauses and smiles. "I'm just desperate by nature."



Cave with Alan Rickman, Jim Broadbent and Daniel Radcliffe in Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

Within six months of finishing the Potter films in 2010, and after a load of “terrible” auditions, she felt she didn’t fit in anywhere and turned to writing. She used all the money she had made to film some sketches for YouTube, “which were awful. It was a very scary time, and it wasn’t until I’d done my first Edinburgh show that I was like: OK, I’m writing, and I have to perform, unfortunately, to get the writing seen.” As the performer, she is, she says with a laugh, “the last resort”.

She continued to get acting work, though – smaller roles in good stuff such as [Grandma’s House](#), [Black Mirror](#), the E4 drama [Glue](#) and the Sky sitcom [Trollied](#). In Buffering, she plays Rosie, a dippy landlady in a millennial houseshare. The sitcom is written by the comedian and Love Island narrator Iain Stirling, who also stars. She says she loved working on it, especially with its ensemble cast. “I’m so solitary with my work, so having people around me who were funny … it didn’t really feel like a job. It was lovely,” she says.

Cave had always wanted to write a novel, having had TV scripts in “development hell” for almost a decade. “I kind of got to the end of that process, and another rejection, and I was just so tired of writing for no reason. I’m not saying you have to write for it to be published – I definitely believe in creativity for the sake of creativity – but I had got to the stage where I felt as if I needed to have a beginning, middle and end to something,” she says.

In the months after Ben’s death, Cave read a huge number of books and memoirs about grief, but couldn’t find anything that accurately reflected her experience of losing a brother: “It was really important to me to write truthfully about what it’s like to be in shock after a traumatic, sudden thing.” She wanted, she says, “to have something out there that would help people who’ve lost a sibling”.



In her new sitcom, *Buffering* (*far right*). Photograph: Mark Johnson/ITV

What surprised her most about grief? She takes a long, unselfconscious pause and looks across the room. “The hardest thing to accept is you have to let go of your life before,” she says. “You’re not living the same life any more. The sooner you accept that, the easier it is, but it’s so hard to accept, and I still don’t think I have. I’m surprised by how brutal it is, that separation of before and after.” She hasn’t had therapy and she doesn’t want to. “It’s something I’m just taking with me all the time. It’s something that I have accepted in my life, and that helps me, because I’m confronting how awful it is, rather than pretending it’s all OK. Being truthful and confronting it helps me, and not needing everything to be glorious and happy all the time. It’s going to be shit a lot of the time, but I am good at finding joy in little things, and hope, and having things to work for.”

There is something appealingly open about Cave. “I just wouldn’t know any other way,” she says, when I mention it. “I like open people. I respond to people who are open in their work.” She related her experience of getting pregnant after a one-night stand with the comedian Alfie Brown in her show *I Loved Her* (their son is six). Then, in her next show, *Sunrise*, as critically acclaimed as the previous one, she explored, with excruciating honesty, her heartbreak and neuroticism when they broke up after the birth of their second child, a daughter. They got back together and last year had another

baby, while also home schooling their two older children with the help of Cave's mother. Cave delivered her second son in the week she was supposed to deliver her novel (it is an understatement to say she has a lot going on).

Does she ever regret being so honest about her life? "I don't know," she says. "I don't have any secrets and I feel a bit safer in that way." There is a liberation in everyone knowing everything. Her novel, she says, "was the first try at doing something veiled. It's definitely fiction, but it is rooted in truth, and I loved that."

Towards the end of her show *Sunrise*, Cave reveals she was raped as a teenager (she says she had just turned 15 and he was her tennis coach). "After I did that show, I did feel exposed suddenly, because people knew everything about my relationship and people got in touch about their rape," she says. "That was quite overwhelming. Even if I got one message saying: 'You helped me talk about my rape,' or: 'You helped me talk about my brother,' or whatever, that's enough." She pauses and smiles. "If it were only one, actually, I'd be like: 'Come on!'"



With Bebe in their podcast *We Can't Talk About That Right Now*.

When she brings up the rape in her show – it is in the context of coincidentally bumping into someone who was involved with the rapist

when Cave was already at a low point – she makes it clear that the show is not about being a survivor of sexual assault and says that it takes up mere minutes of the total runtime. Likewise, when Cave mentioned it in the first episode of [We Can't Talk About That Right Now](#), the podcast she does with Bebe, it was so casually dropped into their conversation that they were criticised for not having a trigger warning.

It seems similar to how she has treated their brother's death – folding it into her life, not flinching from the trauma of it, but also not allowing it to overshadow everything else. "It absolutely hasn't defined me, and I've chosen for it not to define me," she says of the sexual assault, although she is very careful to stress that this is not possible for every survivor. "Other people don't have that choice. It's so massive that it absolutely is going to define them."

It helped, she says, that she had strong support from her family. "I never felt ashamed and was encouraged to seek justice." The man was jailed; many other survivors don't get justice (only [1.6% of rape cases are even prosecuted](#)). Being so open about it also probably helped, she thinks: "Everyone at school knew, because the trial was happening and I talked about it." She says she was aware people were viewing her as a victim, but that, too, could be something she could control. "I learned to joke and deflect. Even if I was hurting, I was like: 'I don't want to be seen as this figure.' I always fought that label off."

It is not that she likes talking about it – of course she doesn't – but she points out rape is more common than we would like to think. She says it is "something that people don't talk enough about. Because if there were more stories of people who've been raped, and then been able to not have it define them, then it makes it easier for people to deal with. Hopefully."

Cave grew up in London, the second eldest of five. Her parents were doctors, but it was a creative household and she was encouraged to do whatever she wanted. There are 10 years between her and Bebe. She had wished for a baby sister; when she arrived, Cave was thrilled. "When I dropped out of university, I was 19 and I had this kind of safe space at home with this child," she says. "And she's been there throughout." She started writing and doing sketches, which she had put on YouTube, with Bebe,

“because she was available. I did my first Edinburgh show [Bookworm, in 2012] and she was in it. Now I think, because of Bebe, it meant I didn’t have to conform.”

I go into the costume fitting for any job and I’m terrified. I’m prepared to be told something unkind

Bebe, also an actor, has become something of a muse and collaborator. Even though they sometimes go for the same parts, there is no rivalry. “All I care about is working with her, because I become a better version of myself with Bebe. I don’t know if she does; maybe she becomes a worse person with me,” she laughs. “But I definitely rely on her hugely for creative purposes.”

When she got the Harry Potter job, chosen from 7,000 girls, it was only her third audition “and it was like winning the lottery”. One of her brothers had signed up with a children’s talent agency and, with nothing much to do, Cave signed up, too. So, having not given much thought to it before, and still at art school, she became an actor. “But I was not a right fit for the industry at that time. Lavender Brown is conventionally pretty, no glasses, small. By the time I went back to do the last film, I had gained a bit of weight and I wasn’t that person any more.”

Nobody ever suggested she lose weight, but it was implied – she remembers one costume director (she won’t say on which job) who grabbed her stomach. “Which was just horrible. And I laughed. You’re like [she puts on a placating voice]: ‘Oh, you’re hurting me. Actually, it’s fine.’” That kind of stuff stays with you, she says. “Now I go into the costume fitting for any job and I’m terrified. I’m prepared to be told something unkind. You’re treated like a different type of thing; you’re not somebody with feelings who has thought about what pants they’re going to wear that day because they’re going to be seen.” Things have improved a lot in the past five years. “Now when they’re nice to me, and they are sensitive to how I may be feeling about my body, or that I may be breastfeeding or whatever, I almost cry.”



‘I’ve definitely considered losing weight – and when I have lost weight, I tend to get a part.’ Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Having not been desperate to make it as an actor at any cost has given Cave a healthy perspective. Did she ever consider giving in to the pressure, losing weight, getting laser eye surgery, whatever, to go for the leading roles? (I say this as if she isn’t in fact beautiful, with phenomenal bone structure and possibly the most perfect skin of anyone I have met.) “I’ve definitely considered losing weight – and when I have lost weight, I tend to get a part.” She smiles. “I mean, it’s not rocket science. But I eat healthily, I’m a normal-sized woman, and I’m still regarded, probably, as a fat actress.”

Instead, with her eccentric clothes and creative pursuits, the industry decided that she was “quirky”. “I’ve just kind of stayed on the quirky path, and that’s fine.” If she has become a bit typecast, she doesn’t mind. “I realised the other day that the last four roles I’ve been cast in, I’ve worn these glasses,” she says of her pale-green owlish specs. “Someone’s going to realise I’m [playing] the same character.” One day, she would like to act in “something completely different”. But, she adds, she would probably have to write it.

Cave sells illustrations through her website – “that’s my day job, and as long as I’ve got that I feel quite safe” – and she is working on her second book. “I want to, eventually, maybe in 30 years’ time, have something made for TV

or film. I have tried so hard, so hopefully that does pay off.” She laughs. “Or it will still be in development when I’m 60: ‘It’s gonna happen this year!’” When I ask what drives her, she says she used to want to be respected as an artist, but the warm response to her book has made her rethink. “I think it is down to creating work that people enjoy,” she says. “Just making them laugh or making them think, and that’s the most important thing to me.”

Buffering premieres with a double episode on ITV2 on 5 August at 10pm. All episodes will then be available on ITV Hub. [Sunset](#) is out now.

This article was amended on 2 August 2021. Cave’s novel, *Sunset*, debuted at No 1 on the bestseller list in the Times, not the Sunday Times, as a previous version stated.

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All the butter: how chefs are transforming the world's greatest spread



Composite: Ampersand Dairies/Guardian Design

Composite: Ampersand Dairies/Guardian Design

Once neglected in favour of supposedly healthier products or mass-produced substitutes, butter is back, and better than ever, thanks to chefs who are adding bone marrow, chocolate and churning their own

[Clare Finney](#)

Mon 2 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

It sounded like another fad – like the [cereal cafe](#) in east London, or the [crisp bar in Soho](#). “This Colorado bistro is the world’s first butter bar,” ran the headline of an article announcing the opening of Bella La Crema, a US restaurant serving “flights” of handmade butters flavoured with spices or herbs. The comparison to beer and wine tasting boards jarred at first – but butter in its truest form is perhaps closer to wine than it is to crisps or cereal: there’s terroir in the pastures; technique in the churning; magic in the addition of bacteria cultures and (optional) flavours. And Bella La Crema, which has been delivering its beloved bourbon butter, rosemary and sage butter, house butter and chocolate butter around the US throughout their lockdowns, and has since started looking for its second site, might conceivably be the next step in a movement that has been quietly taking place in some farms, dairies and restaurants for years.

“It was in the Fat Duck that I first noticed it, around the turn of the millennium,” says Jay Rayner, the Observer’s restaurant critic. “There was a handmade goat’s milk butter with a pronounced cheesy edge to it. Then, in 2006, Stephen Harris at The Sportsman in Kent showed how he churned butter from local milk and flavoured it with salt he made by boiling the seawater from the nearby shore.” Thereafter it became “a thing”. No longer content with packets bought wholesale, restaurants started buying cream, culturing it and churning it in-house. [Chefs](#) pushed the boundaries of flavoured butter, enveloping herbs, spices, vegetables and meat into its golden folds. Those who didn’t make butter on site started to source it direct from small-scale dairies – and, as demand grew, so did the number of butter-makers.



Grant Harrison of Ampersand Dairy. Photograph: Patricia Niven

Butter is the cornerstone of classical cooking: the first food to hit the pan and, more often than not, the final flourish, used to finish off dishes or as a base for sauces. It's a vehicle for flavour but it's also delicious in its own right. Grant Harrison, of Ampersand dairy in Oxfordshire, makes his butter "as buttery as possible. We don't add any flavours, just cream from high-welfare British cows' milk cultured, aged and traditionally barrel churned." Harrison, a former chef, now makes butter for such luminaries as Le Manoir in Oxfordshire and Chiltern Firehouse in London. "In summer, I can taste the wildflowers," says Harris. "When butter is blended from hundreds of different farms in a factory, it loses its specificity and character – but if you make butter from the cream of a field of cows in their own lush pasture, it's amazing. And when you cook with it, when you baste a fish or a piece of meat in your own butter, flavoured with your own sea salt, you get a dish that can't be made by anyone else."

In part, the move back to handmade butter reflects a more general shift toward ingredient-based cooking, and away from the molecular gastronomy of the 90s. Yet the fact that Heston Blumenthal – founder of the Fat Duck in Maidenhead and a pioneer of taking a more science-led approach in the kitchen – was at its forefront with his cheesy butter, alongside Harris, suggests there's more to the trend than this narrative suggests. To make his

leek butter, Tom Simmons of his eponymous restaurant in London Bridge swirls house-made leek oil and smoked salt into a whipped butter, then burns the leek tops to make a smoked ash, which is sprinkled over to finish. At Moor Hall in Lancashire, Mark Birchall whips up his own raw butter with a blend of local Jersey and holstein friesian cream and a sour cream culture, while at Oklava in London, Selin Kiazim concocts her addictive date butter out of medjool dates, spiced black rice vinegar and sugar.



Heston Blumenthal, owner of the Fat Duck and a butter pioneer. Photograph: Ander Gillenea/AFP via Getty Images

When Robin Gill opened his first London restaurant, The Dairy, in 2013, his smoked bone marrow butter was the stuff of legend – but when it came to his second, the Manor, Gill's head chef wanted his own signature spread. So did chefs at subsequent openings. “The chef wants to express their own individuality,” he tells me, “and the butter is their first port of call.” Bread and butter is the new amuse bouche, the “first impression a diner will get of a restaurant, and a good way for the chef to have a bit of fun,” says Simmons.

Gill and Simmons have both noticed public enthusiasm for butter growing over the years, as [sales of spreads such as Flora and I Can't Believe it's Not Butter have declined](#). “The [issues around mass production](#) are more

exposed,” says Gill. In her book [Fat](#), Jennifer McLagen makes a compelling and well-evidenced case for butter, in terms of flavour and nutrition. “As food has become cheaper and more plentiful, we’ve increased our calorie intake, and the sources of those calories have changed radically … Our experiment with reducing [our consumption of animal fats] hasn’t made us healthier, and has robbed our food of taste.” Human nutrition is complex, she writes, “but for the majority of us, eating animal fat isn’t the death sentence we have been led to believe”. In fact, the facts around butter haven’t much changed, says the NHS: it’s still a saturated fat; it should still be eaten in moderation. But popular opinion is increasingly of the view that “pre-industrial”, farm-to-table foods such as butter trump “industrialised” foods, such as butter-imitating spreads.

“Good butter brings a tangible link to our farmers, our landscape, that is deeply ingrained in our psyche,” says Trevor Gulliver, one half of London’s St John restaurant group. To Gulliver and his business partner, Fergus Henderson, butter – they use Glastonbury butter from Somerset – is as “essential as a knife and fork on the table”. “Spreading butter makes you stop and engage,” he says. The taste and process of spreading good butter on good bread “conjures images of cows and fields,” he goes on, insisting that “these strange substitutes served under the banner of butter” can never compete.



The Estate Dairy's Oklava medjool date butter.

Of course, such romantic ideals should be taken with a sprinkle of salt: even Gulliver acknowledges butter needs be enjoyed “in moderation.” “Butter is still a treat. It’s not something to have on a daily basis,” says the British Dietetics Association spokeswoman Rebecca McManamon. Butter from grass-fed cows can have more omega-3s, but don’t kid yourself about the health benefits: if you’re looking for essential fatty acids, “you’re better with salmon and mackerel”. Rather than slathering on the Lurpak, save your buttery moments for meals out – and, when you eat it, eat it not for the nutrients, but for its taste, its story and the delight to be found in simply spreading it on bread.

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The changing art of the subeditor: ‘You had to read the type upside down’



Subeditors at work in the Guardian's Manchester office in 1958 – a pencil-and-paper process that stayed unchanged for decades. Photograph: Bert Hardy/Getty Images

Subeditors at work in the Guardian's Manchester office in 1958 – a pencil-and-paper process that stayed unchanged for decades. Photograph: Bert Hardy/Getty Images

A deputy news production editor at the Guardian speaks to colleagues about how cutting and correcting copy has evolved over decades

Suzanne Warr

Mon 2 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

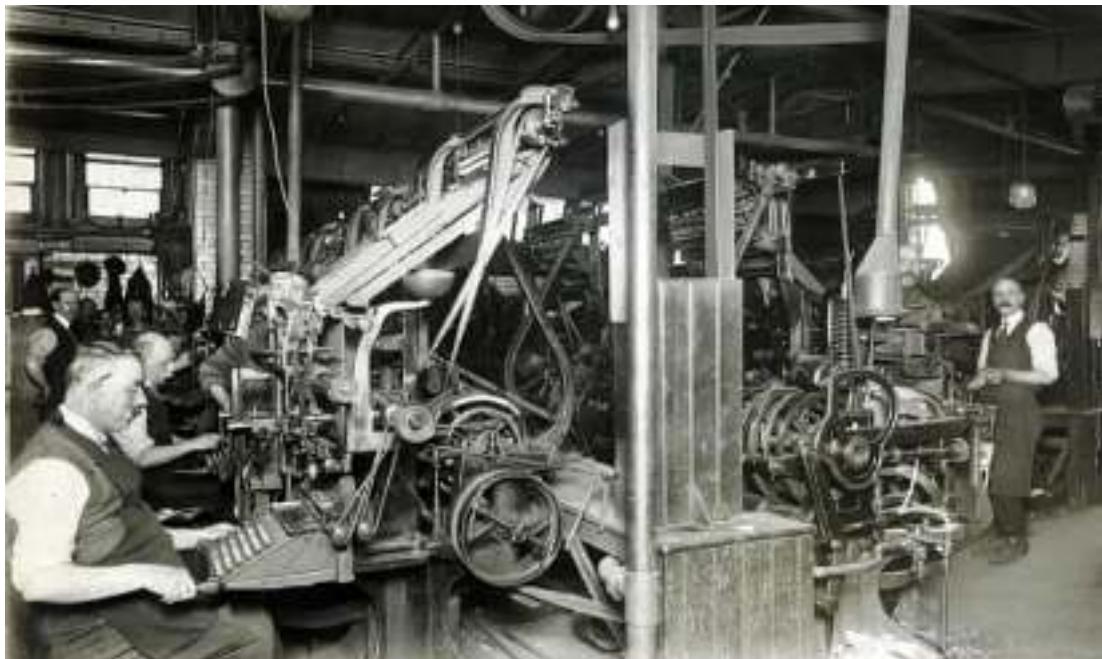
The internet may have revolutionised the media in the 21 years since I joined the Guardian, but my role as a subeditor has stayed essentially the same. We check facts, write headlines and cut stories to the right length, with a final spellcheck before moving it to its next stage.

But until late last century, subediting looked completely different. Chris Dodd started work on the features desk, then based in Manchester, in 1965, after an “interview” in a pub (he didn’t know whether to drink or abstain, or buy a round), while Barry Johnson and Jay Sivell joined the London office

in Farringdon Road in 1986. Shifts then started at various points in the afternoon, and subs (as they are called) enjoyed a leisurely start. “People used to take in chess sets and books, or do the crossword. You could sit for hours with nothing,” says Johnson, who retired in December.

As news shifts progressed, subs sketched out page designs on paper and awaited the stories, or “copy”, which arrived in a wire basket as numbered pages, each containing one or two paragraphs. Subs were given story lengths, measured as inches down a single column of type, and had to estimate how many words to cut. Once the story was approximately the right length, it went to a revise sub to be deemed fit for publication before being placed in another basket to be collected by a messenger and sent by pneumatic tube to the compositing room in the basement. Subs were banned from touching the tubes as this task was controlled by a different union; all three fondly remember that Peter Preston, features editor and later editor, was the only journalist who dared break this rule.

Writing headlines – often two or three hours after editing the story – also involved calculations. Subs got a headline size – say three lines of 36-point type over two columns – and used a table to assess how many characters would fit. Wide letters such as M counted as 1.5 characters and spaces counted as a half. “If it bust by half a character, you might send it down and hope for the best,” says Johnson. “If it didn’t work and the comps [compositors] were feeling helpful, they could squeeze it a bit.” Unless your headline was sent back to you in a tube because it bust, that was usually the last you saw of your work until the morning.



Compositors operating Linotype machines at the Manchester Guardian in 1921. ‘If your headline didn’t work and they were feeling helpful, they could squeeze it a bit.’ Photograph: The Guardian

“When we started, the revise sub was slightly frightening,” says Johnson. “He’d been in Bomber Command in the war and was rather abrupt, though kindly, and he’d sit there smoking his pipe. He’d glare at his travelling alarm clock and glare at the copy, puffing at his pipe more as the evening went on. If he didn’t like a headline, he’d literally throw it back at you.”

Fact-checking could be laborious. Without search engines, having vast general knowledge was crucial, as was frequent use of the desk’s gazetteer and Who’s Who. In office hours, subs could call the library with questions, with answers typically provided in about half an hour. But, says Johnson, in the evening you had to go up to the library yourself. “It consisted of some obsolete textbooks and shelves of cuttings, so you needed a feel for how the minds worked of the people who took the cuttings and what they might have filed things under.” Some reporters, as now, needed more checking than others: Dodd recalls one spelling the name of the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko 13 different ways in one story.

A senior member of the team known as the stone sub would go down to the basement – a cathedral-like space filled with Linotype machines – at 5pm,

when the comps would start work. The stories were handed out to Linotype operators, who set them in molten metal in single lines, known as slugs. Comps would assemble the page, guided by the sketched layout, using the cooled metal type, before it was secured in a frame; dropping it was a disaster known as printer's pie.

There were strict rules for the stone sub. The comp (always male) stood on one side, and the sub was opposite. That line could not be crossed. The comp would tell the sub how many lines a story was over, and the sub made cuts on paper and handed them back to the comp, who took out the equivalent bits in the metal type. On deadline, subs had to be able to read the lead over-matter laid out on the side upside down as well as back to front.



The image of the modern subeditor: Suzanne Warr, with computer and search engine to hand, in the London newsroom. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Sivell says: “It was a responsible shift and I felt pleased to do it, even though it was hard work. I was a very young female journalist and they did know my business better than I did, probably, but they tended to be more helpful to the men.”

Dodd recalls that although most interactions in the comp room were good-natured, it was “a difficult relationship: you’re working [for your editor] on a page with a comp who’s working for the master printer”.

Computers were introduced gradually and eventually only the news pages used hot metal, until it too was noisily ‘banged out’ (a traditional farewell in journalism) in 1987

Diversity was not a priority. When Sivell arrived she was one of two female home news subs, and the Guardian was such a masculine environment that she and her colleague Celia Locks were invited to lunch at the home of Mary Stott, the women’s editor, to discuss their experiences. Improved diversity now, in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, age and sexuality, is reflected in more thoughtful language. “We are more aware of reflecting changes in vocabulary for the readership, and that the very white male vocabulary that used to be part of the job has gone,” says Sivell, who still does freelance shifts for the paper. “We have a style guide that is constantly being reviewed and challenged. Prostitute or sex worker, the use of pronouns such as ‘they’ – this is how language evolves, and that is in the hands of the subs.”

The biggest change in my time has been the focus on the website. From a sideline in an annex, with mostly junior staff, it has become a round-the-clock global operation, with subs in London, Sydney and New York.

These days, many of us in London work across web and print. Some prefer print’s daily rush for the 9pm deadline. Others like the flexibility of web subbing, as well as its speed and reach. Whichever desk we work on, and whichever period we come from, we can all recall the electric atmosphere when working on a big breaking story – from Watergate (Dodd), to the death of Diana (Johnson), the night Portillo lost his seat (Sivell) or the UK voting for Brexit (me).

New technology first arrived for print in the mid-1980s, in the form of Tandys powered by four AA batteries and with a memory of about 1,000 words. Computers were introduced gradually, and eventually only the news pages used hot metal, until it too was noisily “banged out” (a traditional farewell in journalism) in 1987.

The moment when journalists were on machines dealing with type themselves was a huge step, Sivell says. “It was a ropey period for subbing when new tech came in,” admits Dodd.

So were the days before all the technology the era of “proper” subbing? No, says Sivell: “You can focus on the words now; you’re not fiddling about counting how wide a letter is.”

This article was amended on 2 August 2021 to clarify details about the orientation of the page during the stone sub/comp editing process.

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OpinionCoronavirus

Don't blame young people for vaccine hesitancy. The vast majority of us want to get jabbed

Lara Spirit

If Britain really wants to keep everyone safe, we should be worrying about the lack of supplies to poorer nations

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People queue at a drop-in vaccination centre in Hounslow, west London.
Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

People queue at a drop-in vaccination centre in Hounslow, west London.
Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 2 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

“I was thinking this morning that it is a bit like a race,” Sajid Javid [said last Wednesday](#) when commenting on Britain’s vaccine rollout. “The older adults have done their bit. Now we need them to help us start winning in that race. We have passed the baton to younger people, and are saying: ‘Please help us.’”

It seems the health secretary would have you believe young people are now solely responsible for the consequences of his government’s pandemic response. Forget “freedom day” or the [delayed India travel ban](#) that helped the Delta variant get its claws into this country. Now it seems the real culpability lies with a vaccine-hesitant generation that just won’t play its part.

Boris Johnson is reportedly “raging” at our vaccine uptake rates. An [editorial in the Times](#) last month was more explicit still, speaking of “the shameful reluctance of young people to follow the older generation in getting vaccinated”.

The Sunday Telegraph’s front page this weekend reported that [shopping vouchers](#) are to be given out, in time for the start of the new academic year, “to boost youth jabs”. We are encouraged to focus on the fact “just” 67% of under-29s have had a first dose, supposedly forcing the government to offer bribes to increase vaccination levels.

But this is a classic conjuror’s misdirection. The question we should be asking is: what is the government trying to distract our attention from with this contrived controversy over supposedly feckless young people?

It is true that young people are less enthusiastic to get vaccinated than the adult population as a whole: [one in eight under-30s](#) in recent Office for National Statistics data report hesitancy, compared with more than one in 25 of the general adult population who feel the same.

Given the diminishing risk to our lives that the virus poses, this hesitancy is to be expected. Yet the overwhelming majority of young people do want to get jabbed. The ONS figure obscures the fact [two-thirds of young adults](#) have had a single dose – making them the most vaccinated of their age group in the world.

Bear in mind that, for 16 months, this generation has complied with restrictions that were necessary in order to protect people largely other than their age group. From exam-grading mayhem and the university admissions fiasco to the disproportionately high economic impact on the young, my generation has proved itself prepared to play its part in the necessary social solidarity.

As the NHS put it, there was an “encouraging Glastonbury-style rush” when online bookings began for over-18s jabs, with long queues at walk-in centres across England.

The Reddit online discussion forum, [GetJabbed](#), has become the chief tool for many people looking for a quicker way to get a second dose (at four-week intervals for Pfizer, say, as opposed to the eight-week wait recommended by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation).

The community works by publicising walk-in centres, with users logging their own good fortune in order to alert others. The site is full of stories of desperate young people visiting multiple centres. One user, a young woman who wanted to travel to see her terminally ill grandfather and needed to be double dosed to do so, was among those successful. Her partner praised the site: “Actually managing to get a dose after many rejections specifically from this site is beyond awesome.”

I got my second dose this way, as have many friends. But not everyone gets lucky. A walk-in open one day may be overwhelmed and close the next, while those young people who received the Moderna vaccine first time round – a comparative rarity – face added difficulty.

True, the number of vaccines administered has been falling. But many more would have had their second dose had the government been more flexible with the eight-week gap (the European Medicines Agency and US Centers for Disease Control recommend the shorter 21-day interval between Pfizer jabs).

Moreover, instead of focusing so much energy on scapegoating younger citizens, we should instead perhaps be thinking about by far the most pressing aspect of the fight against Covid: the urgent need to vaccinate the

people of poorer nations, both to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and to suppress the emergence of new variants.

Only [0.3% of doses](#) have been administered in low-income countries. After Canada, the UK has more spare doses per head of the population than any country in the world. We've purchased enough to [fully vaccinate our population four times over](#). This is the real scandal: Britain has only just started sending this surplus to the territories where these doses are urgently needed.

Merely a tiny fraction of the UK's purchased doses – 5m– is so far being donated to Covax, the worldwide vaccine sharing system.

It is a question of priorities. When those such as the former M&S chairman and Conservative peer Stuart Rose advocate [paying young people £250](#) to be vaccinated, has it occurred to them that they might be asking the wrong question? The suggested sum could fully vaccinate dozens of healthcare workers in low-income countries, where just [1.1% of people](#) have received at least one dose.

This is a question of basic human decency, but it is in our interest too: if we shirk the task, a vaccine-resistant variant may emerge and land everybody – young and old – back at square one. Already, scientists are concerned about the [Lambda variant](#) that is raging through South America. We have to act fast.

So don't focus on the supposedly errant young. Focus on humanity as a whole, the global mission to vaccinate everyone and the millions of deaths that the west has the power to prevent right now.

- Lara Spirit is a reporter at Tortoise Media, and a former director of Vote For Your Future

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Our political class is agreed: this is all someone else's fault

[Nesrine Malik](#)

These days, everyone in British politics is desperately trying to find The Guy Who Did This

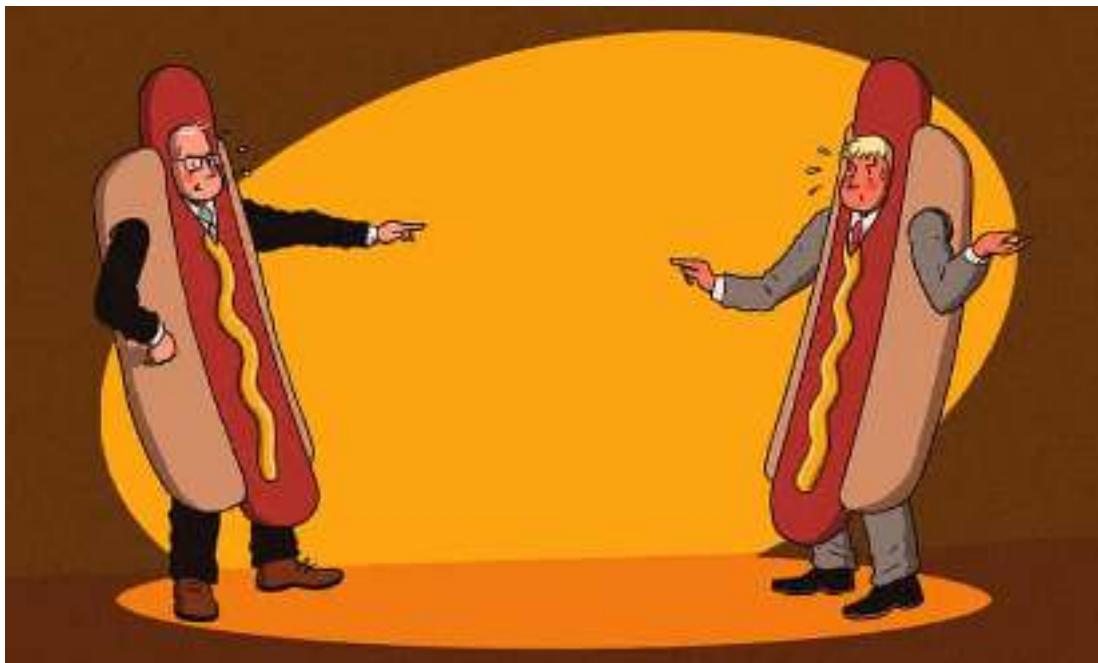


Illustration by R Fresson

Illustration by R Fresson

Mon 2 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

A car shaped like a giant hotdog has just crashed through the glass storefront of a menswear shop. As a crowd assembles to figure out what happened, a man dressed in a hotdog costume appears and begins a loud and concerted effort to identify the person who caused the damage. Bystanders point out to him that he is clearly the culprit, a charge he forcefully denies in ever more aggrieved and preposterous ways.

[It is a scene](#) from the US sketch comedy programme I Think You Should Leave. If you've been on social media this year, you may have seen the much-memed picture of Hotdog Guy saying, "We're all trying to find the guy who did this."

The absurdity of this scene may be familiar to anyone following the news these days. British politics is dominated by arguments about who is to blame for the state of British politics, conducted by the very people who made British politics this way. Hotdog Guy perfectly encapsulates our predicament. We're standing in the middle of the wreckage, watching those who caused it zealously look for the guy who did this.

For all of the leading participants in our long national nightmare, everyone else is to blame. The rhetoric of the right is an upbeat blend of buck-passing for today's crises – caused by Labour governments of the distant past, naturally – and cheerful fatalism about the disasters that await in the future, when we will simply have to suffer what we must. Those who used the language of treachery and putsch to describe anti-Brexiters are now appalled at the "[divisiveness](#)" of social justice protests.

Meanwhile the leading voices of the sensible liberal centre, infuriated by the antics of these shifty charlatans, are similarly preoccupied with pinning the blame on everyone else for their repeated failure to defeat these shifty charlatans. Notorious "spinner" of the truth Alastair Campbell [blasts](#) Boris Johnson for lack of a "moral compass", as this era of hard-Brexit Tory supremacy becomes the exclusive fault of Dominic Cummings and his liars. Others, such as Peter Mandelson – a man who was forced to resign from the cabinet twice – blame loss of voter confidence in Labour [on Jeremy Corbyn](#) and his [Lexiters](#). These are the same people who brought us the Iraq war, and whose primary political project in recent years was the hopeless campaign for a second referendum, which barely laid a glove on the Conservatives while it pummelled Labour.

Their participation in this loud blame game serves only to highlight how little the losers from the [Brexit](#) years understand their role in the current crisis. There has been no honest reckoning with the consequences of decisions made in this pivotal period. No post-match analysis beyond slating the other players and damning the referee.

And so we cycle through an identity parade of suspects to find what or who let this happen. The guy who did this might be apathetic voters who don't do their homework. The guy who did this is Brexit, which broke our politics. The guy who did this might also be the two-party system and its structural limitations in an increasingly fragmented electoral marketplace. The longer the list of things the Tories are getting away with grows, the more you will hear this talk about the illness in the system. There is nothing that can be done, you see – the patient is too sick to accept the cure.

What cannot be admitted in these laments is that many of those wailing loudest regarded Johnson's continuing rule as the lesser of two evils, and played their own part in the precipitous decline of our democratic standards. In the past year, in the face of the government's colossal Covid failures, newspapers such as the Times are full of earnest opinion columns about Johnson's disappointing record, with very little acknowledgment of their passionate backing for his election. "[The fun has gone](#)," we are told by the likes of Matthew Parris, as "voters who trusted the PM have grown resentful" of him (with no reference to who told them to trust him).

The current political terrain may suit the right better than the left, but this is in part because the right has worked assiduously to shift that terrain in its own favour. As [Stuart Hall wrote](#) after Margaret Thatcher trounced Neil Kinnock's Labour in 1987: "Politics does not reflect majorities, it constructs them. And there is no evidence that Labour's commitment to traditionalism can construct such a majority." The right has constructed its own majority by closing borders, "taking back control", waging culture war and fastidiously avoiding solutions for the economic shifts that generate such profitable resentment.

The answer to this cannot be more lamentations on the unfairness of it all, or misguided pride in our refusal to fight on these terms. Almost no one has come out well from Britain's unedifying years of Brexit politics – whose central drama still pits sore winners against sore losers. But it's time to ask harder questions about how we got here. The unpalatable truth is that many actors across the political spectrum made this mess, not just Boris Johnson or Dominic Cummings. And our unmeritocratic consequence-free public culture ensures that members of this self-reproducing elite, along with their failed ideas, remain at the centre of our politics.

In the years between the financial crisis and the Brexit referendum, many people who should have known better sheepishly adopted the right's rhetoric on “[uncontrolled immigration](#)” and the “[deficit crisis](#)” – which merely served to keep tilting the ground in the wrong direction. These errors are still being repeated.

Keir Starmer’s Labour has mostly rehashed and reheated the same rhetoric about [patriotism](#) and [borders](#) that plays to Conservative strengths, topped with a dollop of “They go low, we go high” blather. Labour’s main strategy is waiting for the government to topple under the weight of its own failures and contradictions, as seen in Starmer’s many line-manager warnings for Johnson to “[get a grip](#)” on this whole Covid thing before he’s sent a formal warning, copied in to HR.

Instead of blaming and waiting, [Labour](#) needs to mount an independent offensive to build its own majority by providing solutions to the problems caused by slashed benefits and extractive overlords. It needs to make its case on its own terms, not just as the obviously nicer alternative to Johnson’s evil sheriff.

The Tories have no use for taking responsibility; what government does? But those who hope to vanquish them do, if they are ever to stop repeating the mistakes that freeze them out of power. Until that happens, we are just watching an argument among many men in hotdog suits. But only one is getting away with it.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionEthical and green living

Today it's cool, tomorrow it's junk. We have to act against our throwaway culture

Jonathan Chapman

We need products we can repair, reuse and recycle – not ones deliberately built to become obsolete



Cobalt mining in Congo: ‘In the urban mines of tomorrow, cobalt will be processed from broken flatscreens TVs, not acid-rinsed from a million tons of rubble.’ Photograph: Sebastian Meyer/Corbis/Getty Images

Cobalt mining in Congo: ‘In the urban mines of tomorrow, cobalt will be processed from broken flatscreens TVs, not acid-rinsed from a million tons of rubble.’ Photograph: Sebastian Meyer/Corbis/Getty Images

Mon 2 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

Never have we wanted, owned and wasted so much stuff. Our consumptive path through modern life leaves a wake of social and ecological destruction – trainers barely worn, ignored AI-powered digital assistants gathering dust, and forgotten smartphones languishing in drawers. By what perverse alchemy do our newest, coolest things so rapidly transform into meaningless junk?

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Over the past century, economically aggressive corporations have mined, logged, trawled, drilled, scorched, levelled and poisoned the earth, to the point of total ecological collapse. Our material possessions connect us to destructive practices via invisible threads of commerce, politics and power. Rare elements are clawed from the earth by the fingers of children small enough to jam their bodies into fissures within ore seams, beneath rock and mud. A “smart” light switch houses a fingernail-sized microchip containing more than half the elements of the periodic table. Many are “conflict minerals” such as tin, tungsten and tantalum, linking us to violence, war and unimaginable human suffering in underregulated parts of the world.

Do not be fooled by the deceptive material lightness of Alexa, Amazon’s cloud-based voice service. The extended product network of an AI system reaches out to a globally distributed infrastructural stack comprising energy-hungry datacentres and swarms of planet-orbiting satellites. Consider all the material-rich products in a typical home. Cities, and the mountains of material-rich products within them, are the “urban mines” of the global north.

Despite our throwaway tendencies we also own objects we treasure, which hold intense meaning and significance beyond their monetary value. For years, I’ve run “object-handling sessions” to understand why we keep certain things and let go of others. Groups of people bring their cherished possessions and share the personal stories behind them.

At one session, a participant brought the white T-shirt she wore the day her boyfriend proposed. She was up a ladder at the time, paintbrush in hand,

decorating the guest bedroom. She shared that it connects her to that moment and reassures her that she is enough, just as she is.

At another session, one participant brought a small blanket. Wrapped carefully inside was a model made of about a dozen multicoloured Lego bricks. He tearfully recounted the story of his young son's battle with leukaemia, a battle the little boy tragically lost. Years later, the father gathered the strength to go through his son's old toys and give them to friends, family, and local charity shops. He found this work-in-progress model in the Lego box: a precious object that connects him powerfully to his son, and a time when he was well enough to play.

Objects like these are, naturally, very rare, and occupy the very depths of our material worlds. Of course, most of our stuff occupies the more densely populated shallows. Up there, meaningful connections are weaker, product lifetimes are shorter, and cycles of consumption and waste are far more destructive.

We are surrounded by throwaway products with obsolescence built in. Electronics are particularly disposable by design. Apple's [AirPod earphones](#), for example, contain two lithium batteries entombed in glue and solder, making them impossible to replace when they can no longer hold charge.

Right-to-repair legislation is being introduced in [Britain](#), the [European Union](#) and [14 US states](#), penalising manufacturers whose products are made to break and forcing them to create products that can be salvaged more easily. Although these policy instruments move fairly quickly, the industry shift required to deliver the change takes considerably longer.

The “circular economy” takes the beginnings and ends of product life cycles and bends them round to form a closed loop. Within this loop, materials remain in use for longer before being reprocessed into new products. In contrast, the established linear model of production and consumption is more like a straight line, with inbuilt social and ecological destruction at either end.

In the urban mines of tomorrow, gold will be extracted from old computers, not ore; cotton will be harvested from well-worn shirts, not fields; and cobalt

will be processed from broken flatscreen TVs, not acid-rinsed from a million tons of rubble. If this all sounds like a pipe dream, note that [the medals](#) at the Tokyo Olympics are made of gold, silver and bronze recovered from the nation's e-waste.

We are transitioning to a circular economy, with a shift to products designed to last and made to be made again. Levi's in-store repair workshops offers adjustment and customisation services. Ikea offers furniture you lease rather than own. And the Adidas [Futurecraft Loop](#) performance running shoe is made to be remade. These circular design tactics, along with many others, can move us towards a more just, sustainable future.

However, such initiatives can also come with their [own attendant problems](#).

[Fairphone](#) is the world's first conflict-free modular smartphone. Its design allows users to make small repairs (replace a cracked screen) and upgrades (replace the battery). Old parts are returned to be recycled within a closed-loop system. All products should be designed this way and reimagined as dynamic, adaptive systems that evolve and change as their users' needs evolve and change.

As with any sustainability transition, the risks of greenwashing are inevitable. Many companies falsely claim to recycle and refurbish end-of-life products to attract ethically minded customers. Others deny their reliance on conflict minerals, fooling us into believing their feeble carbon offsetting programme makes them good people.

Certainly, the prospect of selling fewer products sounds like commercial suicide. And if your business model is based on selling large numbers of impossible-to-recycle products designed for rapid obsolescence, this idea doesn't work. But what we need is an economy of better, not more.

Simply having more stuff stopped making people happier years ago. We need new business models based on products and services that last – products designed to be maintained, upgraded and easily repaired, and which can be leased or shared, giving them multiple lives in the hands of multiple users. It's a new vision for an "experience-heavy, material-light" sensibility that increases the quality and longevity of our relationships with material

things, and which demonstrates why design can – and must – lead the transition to a sustainable future.

- Jonathan Chapman is the author of [Meaningful Stuff: Design That Lasts](#) and professor at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Design
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It's a glorious feeling when you and your singles bubble buddy just hang doing nothing

[Melanie Tait](#)

A chance to watch old videos and eat junk does wonders for the soul after the sadness and loneliness of weeks of lockdown – even with no hugs



‘Connection with another person keeps the black dog from the door for a few extra hours, days, weeks and maybe even months ... It even creates some sort of new shared life.’ Photograph: Westend61/Getty Images

‘Connection with another person keeps the black dog from the door for a few extra hours, days, weeks and maybe even months ... It even creates some sort of new shared life.’ Photograph: Westend61/Getty Images

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When the singles bubble was announced, I found myself awash with what people much cooler than me call “the feels”. Relief. Excitement. Terror. I’ll be able to have a hug! I’ll be able to sit on a couch with someone and do nothing! I’ll have to clean my house!

Luckily I escaped the horror of having to choose between my excellent group of single friends who live alone. Or should I say I escaped the horror of having to ask someone to be my singles bubble who might not want to commit to me being their singles bubble.

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I’m not sure how I would have convinced them. I have a video player and The Man From Snowy River on VHS? I have a very challenging Georges Seurat puzzle that will kill a few hours? My flat is in the Deliveroo zone for Messina gelato?

The lucky escape from this hellish judgment comes simply because one of my besties was born six years after me into the same family and also lives alone. Someone I bullied into having the same taste in pop culture and junk food as me. Yep, my sister was going to be my singles bubble buddy.

How sweet our bubble time would be: she would come over early Saturday night, we would have a great hug, we’d cook the last pack of a discontinued packet macaroni dish I’d saved for a special occasion, we’d watch Hello, Dolly! while complaining about how perfect the movie would be without that grumpy old bastard Walter Matthau, then she’d go home.

Yet the plans of one who’d been jacked up on coffee for a month without company never do run smooth, and my sister, let’s call her Sarah, because that’s her name, arrived at 3pm. As I greeted her in the shared courtyard of my building, I went for a hug.

“I don’t think we can do that.” she said.

“We’re bubbling, of course we can.”

“Not here, everyone’ll see!”

By the time we were inside, she’d forgotten about a hug. There’d be no hug.

“I’ve got some click-and-collect from K-mart, so let’s go for a walk,” was her next suggestion. A walk?! That’s what people who don’t have a singles bubble do. People who do have a singles bubble sit around on each other’s couches and eat nice cheese or drink wine, don’t they?

Nope. Turns out people with a singles bubble walk too. We grabbed the dogs and walked the almost-empty streets to the shopping centre.

Along the way there and back, a bunch of things happened that were made better by having a human there who wasn’t in a hurry: we walked past a friend, her partner and their baby and I got to spend the next five minutes taking my sister through how special this friend is; we came upon a garden that looked like a baby Brides of Christ set and started imagining up the nonna who’d planted it; and as we turned a corner back into my street my sister pointed out the balcony where the Strictly Ballroom Coke sign scene was filmed and suddenly I loved my neighbourhood a little bit more.

Hot Fuzz replaced Hello, Dolly!, takeaway burgers replaced the mac cheese. Nothing went as planned, but I went to bed buoyed by having some actual face-to-face company.

This mood, the one that comes from hanging with someone fun, hung around until the next morning because while I was having a coffee watching Insiders I actually started drafting a “thank you for the singles bubble card” to [New South Wales](#) health minister Brad Hazzard as David Speers grilled him about the lockdown. That’s how upbeat I felt.

[Without a ‘single bubble’ during lockdown, NSW are switching off an energy source I need to survive | Melanie Tait](#)

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Sunday came and with it another visit from Sarah (still no hug). We had a moment of triumphant joy after discovering while none of our streamers had A League of Their Own, I had it on VHS. Watching the furry screen and marvelling at how brilliant a young Rosie O'Donnell is flung us back to our childhood, putting this video on so many times we wrecked the tape. She introduced me to "chip masala" (salt and vinegar chips, Twisties and pieces of chocolate mixed in a bowl) while I bawled over the grand injustice of the hundreds of years women's sport hasn't been taken as seriously as men's.

An attempt on the Georges Seurat puzzle was made and quickly aborted.

Pretty dull, right? In pre-Covid life, this wouldn't have been a successful weekend. I might have even seen it as wasted – without any theatre or cafes or dinners with friends. In this pandemic life it's a gift to spend time with someone doing nothing and being boring, especially if you're someone who's been alone in lockdown for five weeks.

Connection with another person keeps the black dog from the door for a few extra hours, days, weeks and maybe even months. It fills the hours with more joy as we watch them tick by, hoping to get out of lockdown. It even creates some sort of new shared life.

The thing is: even though lockdown is harsh and isolating, it's a little less so after this past weekend.

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Amnesty condemns Colombia police brutality after scores of protesters killed

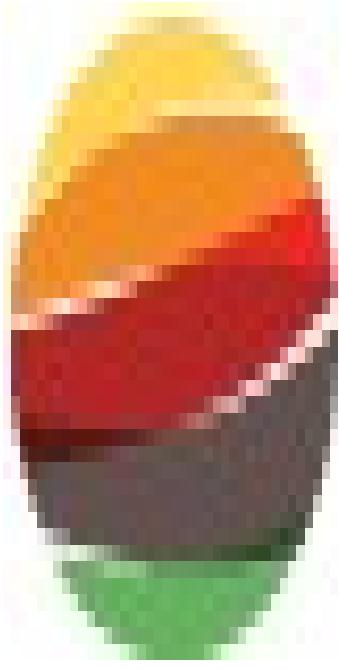
‘He died as he lived, resisting’, says mother of young artist killed in Cali, as report claims authorities used systematic ‘pattern of violence’ in city



A soldier stands guard in a street in Cali, Colombia, on 30 April, a day after a protest against the tax reform bill launched by President Ivan Duque.
Photograph: Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty

A soldier stands guard in a street in Cali, Colombia, on 30 April, a day after a protest against the tax reform bill launched by President Ivan Duque.
Photograph: Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty

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[Joe Parkin Daniels](#) in Cali, Colombia

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Mon 2 Aug 2021 12.52 EDT

Nicolás Guerrero, a 26-year-old artist from the Colombian city of Cali, took to the streets on 2 May to protest against the lack of opportunities he saw in his country. He had a family in Spain that he had hoped one day to bring to South America. But later that night, after riot police launched a brutal crackdown, he was found lying on the pavement, seriously wounded. He died hours later in hospital.



Laura Guerrero, whose son Nicolás was killed during police suppression of protests in Cali on 3 May. Since then she has been on the streets herself demanding justice. Photograph: Joe Parkin Daniels

“He loved Cali, he loved Colombia, and all he wanted was to make life here better,” Laura Guerrero, Nicolás’s mother, told the Guardian at a police kiosk in Cali that was burned out during the protests and has since been converted by locals into a library in her son’s honour. “He died as he lived, resisting.”

The police violence that the younger Guerrero found himself swept up in was not an isolated incident, but part of something systemic and institutional, according to a report published by Amnesty International on Friday.

“The incidents documented were not isolated or sporadic, but rather reflect a pattern of violence on the part of the Colombian authorities, who have responded to the protest with stigmatisation, criminalisation, unlawful police repression and militarisation,” said the report, titled [Cali: In the epicentre of repression](#). Amnesty also described “acts of urban paramilitarism by armed civilians”.

Protests in Colombia began in late April, initially against a tax proposal that has since been axed, though they quickly morphed into a nationwide howl of outrage over entrenched economic disparity. Protesters stayed in the streets for nearly two months, with marches taking place almost every day in major cities. Some protesters put up roadblocks, and some private and public property was damaged.



People in Cali protest against a tax reform bill they say will leave them poorer - proposals that have since been dropped. Photograph: Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty

The police response was brutal, with at least [44 protesters killed](#) and 1,650 injured across the country. A recent human rights commission to Colombia made up of delegates from 13 countries found that the authorities were using counter-insurgency tactics honed in fighting the country's leftist rebel groups against protesters.

“People need to know what is happening here, because we’re not making the dead up,” Guerrero said. “The dead are real.”

Amnesty International said the practices described in its report were representative of hundreds of accounts from protesters and human rights

defenders and organisations, and that it had carried out digital verification of audio visual material.

The report comprises analysis of three events that took place during the protests. The first took place in Siloé, a hillside favela in Cali raided by police on 3 May. Then, on 9 May, a caravan of indigenous protesters was attacked by armed civilians as police looked on, with 11 demonstrators wounded. The third was a raid on a neighbourhood near the Valle university, carried out by armed civilians, reportedly in coordination with police.



A police officer fires tear gas at protesters on 3 May. Amnesty described the police response as designed to ‘discourage peaceful protest’. Photograph: Andres Gonzalez/AP

“Under the pretext of restoring order, terrible injuries were inflicted on hundreds of people and dozens of young people lost their lives,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, [Americas](#) director at Amnesty International, in a statement ahead of the report’s publication. “What happened in Cali shows the violent response of the authorities and the true objectives behind this repression: to instil fear, discourage peaceful protest and punish those demanding to live in a fairer country.”

The fact that Cali – the vibrant, lively and self-professed home of salsa dancing – became the hotspot of such violence and repression did not surprise some analysts, who attribute the unrest there to a cocktail of social tensions.

“Cali has a large youth population and this social uprising has been led by excluded young people,” said Alejandro Lanz Sánchez, director of Temblores, a Colombian human rights monitor. He added that Cali also has long been a hub of drug-related violence and inequality, both factors that drove protests.

The reports of police violence are dispiriting for those who hoped for a peaceful future for Colombia when the country signed a historic peace deal with the leftist guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc), in 2016.



Relatives and friends of Nicolás Guerrero gather around candles surrounding the words ‘Nico was killed by Esmad’ - the Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios - the riot control unit of the Colombian police. Photograph: Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty

Many hoped that the deal, alongside formally ending five decades of civil war that [killed 260,000 people](#) and forced more than 7 million to flee their

homes, would usher in a new chapter in which Colombians would settle their differences with words rather than bullets.

Implementation of the deal has instead faltered during the leadership of president Iván Duque, who took office in 2018 after campaigning on a platform sceptical of the peace accords.

[‘They can’t take it any more’: pandemic and poverty brew violent storm in Colombia](#)

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“Let’s not forget that these protests are also against violence and favour of implementing the peace deal,” Lanz Sánchez said.

Colombia’s government has shown steadfast resistance in the face of mounting international criticism. Reforms were announced earlier in July, including new uniforms and human rights training for riot police, though critics say the changes are cosmetic rather than practical.

Earlier this week, border authorities risked diplomatic furore when they moved to expel Rebecca Linda Marlene Sprößer, a German national who took part in protests in Cali and posed for photos with the so-called “Front Line”, an amorphous group of protesters that battled with the police. Ahead of marches on 20 July, police launched a crackdown on alleged Front Line members, having previously labelled them “terrorists”.



A demonstrator creates a mural with a portrait of Nicolás Guerrero. While the initial spark for the protests has gone, protesters say they are still being intimidated. Photograph: Sebastian Barros/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

In response to the criticisms, police in Colombia have said they have opened 157 investigations of alleged misconduct by officers, including 11 for homicide, but also complained of “fake news,” pointing out that two officers had been killed and another 35 shot during the protests.

For Laura Guerrero, the findings of human rights watchdogs and the intransigence of the government are hardly surprising.

“We’ve long had to live with the abuse of authority, indiscriminate gunfire, disproportionate use of force, and live rounds [fired] against people who throw some rocks,” Guerrero said, just a few blocks from where her son was killed. “We knew that there was going to be fire and blood, because here it’s easier to rain bullets than put food on tables.”

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Hong Kong singer and activist arrested over ‘corrupt conduct’

Anthony Wong accused of breaking law by singing at a pro-democracy rally three years ago



Local media reported that Anthony Wong had been released on bail.
Photograph: South China Morning Post/Getty Images

Local media reported that Anthony Wong had been released on bail.
Photograph: South China Morning Post/Getty Images

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Mon 2 Aug 2021 03.19 EDT

A prominent [Hong Kong](#) singer and pro-democracy activist has been arrested by the city's anti-corruption watchdog over accusations he broke the law by singing at a political rally three years ago.

The arrest of Anthony Wong on Monday is the latest official move against those who had been pushing for greater democracy in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

Hong Kong's independent commission against corruption said Wong performed two songs at the 2018 rally and urged attendees to vote for the pro-democracy candidate Au Nok-hin in a byelection.

The watchdog also charged Au, who won the election, in part for publicising the rally on social media and saying that Wong would be performing.

The watchdog said in a statement that providing others with refreshments and entertainment at an election event was "a corrupt conduct and a serious offence" and against the elections ordinance.

Local media reported Wong was released on bail. Au has been in jail since March after being one of the 47 [pro-democracy activists arrested for alleged subversion](#) over an unofficial primary election they held last year. The unofficial polls, which have historically been held by both sides of the political divide, were attended by more than 600,000 people and were widely seen as an unofficial statement on the government.

The arrests come as authorities crack down on dissent in Hong Kong following the 2019 anti-government protests sparked by concerns that the former British colony was losing the freedoms it was promised when it was handed over to Chinese control in 1997. Opposition figures, media, legal groups, unions and activists have been targeted.

China last year imposed a sweeping national security law that has since been used to arrest more than 100 pro-democracy figures. Changes have also been made to Hong Kong's election laws to reduce the number of directly elected legislators and give a largely pro-Beijing committee the leeway to nominate legislators.

The crackdown has drawn criticism from many governments around the world.

Wong rose to fame in the 1980s as the vocalist for pop duo Tat Ming Pair and later embarked on a solo career.

In 1989 Tat Ming Pair played at a benefit concert after the Tiananmen Square massacre, and travelled with the 1990 North American Concert for Democracy in China tour. Wong also co-founded the LGBTQ+ rights group BigLove Alliance.

He became an outspoken supporter of the city's democracy movement, backing the 2019 protests as well as the ["umbrella revolution" protests](#) that hit the city in 2014. His support for the 2014 protests led to a ban on performing in mainland China and his music was removed from streaming sites.

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Resurgent Taliban escalates nationwide offensive in Afghanistan

Afghan forces defend western city of Herat and Lashkar Gah in south as Kandahar airport hit by rockets



An Afghan National Army commando stands guard on a vehicle in Herat province on Sunday. Photograph: Hoshang Hashimi/AFP/Getty Images

An Afghan National Army commando stands guard on a vehicle in Herat province on Sunday. Photograph: Hoshang Hashimi/AFP/Getty Images

Peter Beaumont and agencies

Sun 1 Aug 2021 08.47 EDT

The Taliban escalated its nationwide offensive in [Afghanistan](#) on Sunday, renewing assaults on three major cities and rocketing a major airport in the south amid warnings that the conflict was rapidly worsening.

As Afghan government forces struggled with a resurgent Taliban after the [withdrawal of US-led foreign forces](#), hundreds of commandos were deployed to the economically important western city of Herat, while authorities in the southern city of Lashkar Gah called for more troops to rein in the assaults amid fierce fighting.

In Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital of Helmand – once the focus of UK military efforts – eyewitnesses described street fighting, bodies lying in the open and Afghan government and US airstrikes raining down on [Taliban](#) positions.

According to reports from the city, Afghan forces remained in control of the city centre late on Sunday.

[Areas under Taliban and government control in Afghanistan](#)

The current focus of the Taliban's efforts appears to be a number of key provincial capitals, not least in the country's south, with the ambition that the fall of Kandahar or Lashkar Gah would rapidly topple the five surrounding provinces.

The capture of any major urban centre would also take their current offensive to another level and fuel concerns that the army is incapable of resisting the Taliban's advances.

The spokesperson for the Afghan armed forces, Gen Ajmal Omar Shinwari, told a press conference on Sunday that three provinces in southern and western Afghanistan faced critical security situations.

Aid agencies are also fearful that the fall of a major city would worsen an emerging humanitarian crisis that has already forced large numbers to flee their homes.

“The aircraft are bombing the city every minute. Every inch of the city has been bombed,” Badshah Khan, a resident of Lashkar Gah, told Agence

France-Presse by phone.

“You can see dead bodies on the streets. There are bodies of people in the main square.”

The Taliban also struck the sprawling Kandahar airport in southern Afghanistan with at least three rockets overnight, the insurgent group’s spokesman said on Sunday, adding that the aim was to thwart airstrikes conducted by Afghan government forces.

Afghanistan’s neighbours step up efforts to prevent civil war

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“Kandahar airport was targeted by us because the enemy were using it as a centre to conduct airstrikes against us,” said Zabiullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesperson. Afghan government officials said the rocket attacks forced authorities to suspend all flights and the runway was partially damaged.

Airport chief Massoud Pashtun said two rockets had hit the runway and repairs were under way, with planes likely to resume service later on Sunday.

The facility is vital to maintaining the logistics and air support needed to keep the Taliban from overrunning the city, while also providing aerial cover for large tracts of southern Afghanistan.

Officials said the Taliban saw Kandahar as a major strategic focus for their efforts amid the suggestion that the Taliban would like to use it as a temporary capital in the south.

In the country’s west, Afghan officials acknowledged that the Taliban had gained control of strategic buildings around Herat city, forcing civilians to remain in their homes.

On Sunday, the ministry of defence said that hundreds of commandos had been sent to Herat to help beat back the insurgent assault.

“These forces will increase offensive operations and suppress the Taliban in Herat,” the ministry tweeted.

Lashkar Gah, however, appears the most vulnerable.

[US launches emergency airlift to rescue Afghan allies at risk of Taliban's revenge](#)

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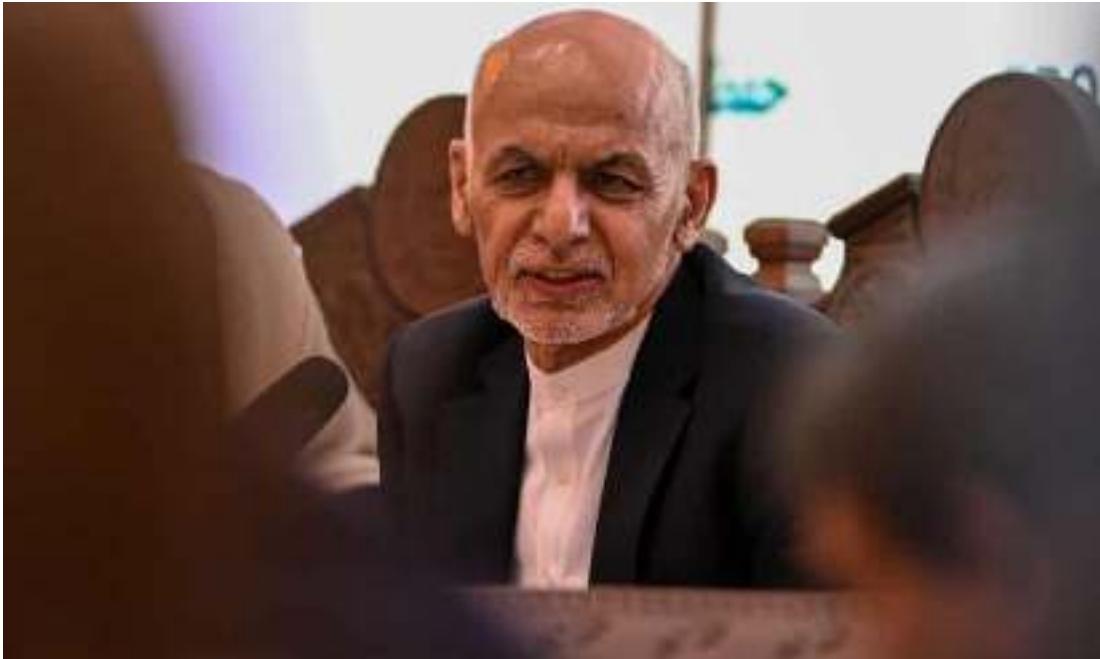
Heavy clashes between the Taliban and government forces were continuing inside the city on Sunday, with militant fighters described as being only a few hundred metres from the governor's office on Saturday amid Afghan and US airstrikes on Taliban positions.

“Fighting is going on inside the city and we have asked for special forces to be deployed,” Ataullah Afghan, the head of Helmand provincial council, told AFP.

“The city is in the worst condition. I do not know what will happen,” said Halim Karimi, a resident of the city of 200,000 residents.

“Neither the Taliban will have mercy on us, nor will the government stop bombing.”

The Taliban has been advancing in Afghanistan after the [withdrawal of US and Nato troops](#) from the country, and in recent weeks the fundamentalist Islamist group said it had captured more than half of all Afghanistan’s territory, including [border crossings with Iran and Pakistan](#).



President Ashraf Ghani at a meeting in the presidential palace on Wednesday. Photograph: Sajjad Hussain/AFP/Getty Images

As fighting raged, President Ashraf Ghani again slammed the Taliban for failing to marshal its negotiating power to reach a peace deal.

“We want peace but they want us to surrender,” Ghani said at a cabinet meeting.

The government has repeatedly dismissed the militants’ steady gains over the summer as lacking strategic value but has largely failed to reverse their momentum on the battlefield.

The Taliban has seized Afghan cities in the past but have managed to retain them only briefly.

The increasingly dire situation in Afghanistan has raised fears of a new Taliban takeover, with Boris Johnson admitting in the House of Commons last month that he was “apprehensive” about the future of Afghanistan.

“If you ask me whether I feel happy about the current situation in Afghanistan, of course I don’t. I’m apprehensive,” Johnson told parliament’s liaison committee.

Thousands have been killed in the conflict, including more than 50,000 Afghan civilians and more than 2,000 US and 400 British troops.

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US launches emergency airlift to rescue Afghan allies at risk of Taliban's revenge

Evacuation flights start before visas are issued after insurgents make sweeping gains in provinces



Afghan security personnel and militia fighting against the Taliban, stand guard in Enjil district of Herat province on Friday. Photograph: Hoshang Hashimi/AFP/Getty Images

Afghan security personnel and militia fighting against the Taliban, stand guard in Enjil district of Herat province on Friday. Photograph: Hoshang

Hashimi/AFP/Getty Images

Emma Graham-Harrison

Sun 1 Aug 2021 04.15 EDT

America has launched emergency airlifts for Afghans who worked with its armed forces and diplomats, evacuating hundreds who are still waiting for their visas to the United States on military flights.

Only people in the final stages of a long, slow and bureaucratic visa process are eligible for the airlift, but bringing applicants to the continental US in large numbers is still unprecedented in recent years, officials working on the programme say.

It reflects growing political pressure in the US over the fate of Afghans who supported the Nato mission in [Afghanistan](#) and now face retaliation as the security situation deteriorates.

Tens of thousands of Afghans with a US connection are waiting for a response to their visa applications, including more than 18,000 who worked for the military or embassy, and in excess of 50,000 family members eligible to travel with them. Some have been in limbo for years.

There is increasing concern about the fate of Afghan allies in the UK too. [Dozens of former military commanders](#) last week called on the government to allow more people who worked for British forces to settle in the country.

Last week CNN reported that a former interpreter for American troops had been [beheaded by Taliban fighters](#) at a militant checkpoint. Others still in the country say they face regular death threats and fear they will be hunted down as the insurgents seize more territory.

The Taliban's sweeping gains, in a campaign launched in May, have so far been confined to rural areas, but government troops and militias that back them have been struggling to hold back [Taliban](#) fighters inside three provincial capitals.

In the south, airstrikes were called in to protect Lashkar Gah in Helmand and Kandahar City, while in western Herat, fighting closed the airport for several days and the UN said its compound came under attack by militants who killed a guard.

The first evacuation flight to America landed on Thursday, with about 200 passengers from Kabul, said JC Hendrickson, senior director for policy and advocacy at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which is supporting the new arrivals. In a sign of how hastily the programme has been set up, Hendrickson said they were only asked to take part last week and rushed staff to Virginia to prepare.

The IRC has helped more than 16,000 Afghans settle in the US after securing special immigrant visas (SIVs), but this is the first time they have been involved with visa processing. They expect up to 3,000 people to arrive on the special flights.

“Certainly in the last decade or two, I’ve never heard of anything like this ... in the territorial United States,” Hendrickson said.

“It’s a big step in the right direction, supporting people whose lives are at risk because of their affiliation with the United States.”

He called on the government to go further in supporting Afghans at risk, including clearing the backlog of SIV applications, and setting up a separate visa programme for Afghans who have American links that could make them Taliban targets, but do not qualify for an SIV visa.

“The government should take an ‘everything and the kitchen sink’ approach to helping people who are US-affiliated,” Hendrickson said, praising moves in Congress to allocate additional resources to processing visas for military and embassy staff, and create a visa pathway for other Afghans at risk. “There are tools that the US government can can deploy outside of this specific (SIV) process. And we think it’s urgently necessary that they do so.”

President Biden has promised that the US will not abandon allies in Afghanistan, as it did during its hasty exit from Vietnam.

The government is scrambling around for ways to get the tens of thousands of visa applicants to safety, while they are still being vetted, and is reportedly in talks with governments in Central Asia and the Persian Gulf about hosting them.

Those being allowed directly into the US, under a condition known as “humanitarian parole”, are the small proportion who had already completed strict background and security vetting. They were only waiting for medical checks, or for visas to be issued.

Normally people who secure SIV visas are expected to arrange their own travel from Afghanistan, but military planes have flown this group to the US. They will be housed on the Fort Lee military base until they have completed the final stages of visa applications, the Pentagon said [last week](#).

The Taliban [have said](#) they will not harm interpreters but few of those who served with the US military trust that assurance. There have been multiple reports of human rights abuses, including targeted killings, in areas seized by the group.

These include video that appeared to show Taliban fighters [executing a group](#) of commandos as they tried to surrender in May. The Taliban deny executing the soldiers and say the video was faked.

Last month militants also mutilated the body of Pulitzer prize-winning photographer Danish Siddiqui, who worked for the Reuters news agency, [the New York Times reported](#) on Saturday, citing photographs as well as Afghan and Indian officials.

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Johnson's travel policy in chaos, Labour says, after 'amber watchlist' ditched

Ministers need to get a grip on 'reckless U-turns and confusion', shadow transport secretary says

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Boris Johnson had been due to take a decision this week on whether to create the new warning category based on advice from the Joint Biosecurity

Centre. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Boris Johnson had been due to take a decision this week on whether to create the new warning category based on advice from the Joint Biosecurity Centre. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Damien Gayle](#)

Tue 3 Aug 2021 13.24 EDT

Ministers in England are preparing to decide which countries should have tougher quarantine requirements imposed for travellers returning home from them, amid criticism the system has been thrown into “chaos”.

Senior members of the cabinet will meet to mull over the latest case, vaccine and variant rates in territories across the world and are expected to make an announcement about changes to the red, amber and green lists later on this week.

However, [Labour](#) have upped calls for the amber list to be scrapped. A shadow cabinet minister accused the government of creating too much confusion for passengers, following the revelation a mooted sixth tier known as the “amber watchlist” had been killed off due to a cabinet revolt, fury from backbench Tory MPs and resistance from the aviation industry.

The Guardian understands the Foreign Office was broadly in favour of the idea, with transport secretary Grant Shapps also reportedly onboard – though his allies swiftly briefed otherwise.

In the penultimate review of the traffic light system before summer ends, likely to be watched keenly by those planning a trip away during August, sources said France was likely to be removed from the amber plus list – the only country in this category, which would mean fully-vaccinated travellers could avoid up to 10 days’ quarantine.

Concern about the prevalence of the Beta variant in France has abated, with the country’s ambassador to the UK, Catherine Colonna, pointing out it “keeps declining” and now accounts for just 0.8% of infections.

Spain is most at risk of going on the amber plus list due to the Beta variant. In mid-July it had one of the highest rates of any country in the world for sequenced cases found to be Beta, so there have been fears about the popular destination's status changing for several weeks.

Tensions around the table will be fraught when ministers meet this week, given the furious briefing war that imploded over the now-defunct amber watchlist.

It was designed to give travellers' notice a country was at risk of being moved to the red list, though government insiders privately admitted it would have been near-impossible to put some countries on the red list given the impact this would have on supply chains and the limited availability of hotel quarantine rooms available.

So they confessed that the amber watchlist would have acted as more of a deterrent to encourage people not to travel to and from them, without actually imposing any tougher restrictions.

Despite the idea having been killed off, Labour have upped calls for the entire amber list to be scrapped.

Wes Streeting, the shadow child poverty secretary, said there was too much “chaos and confusion”. He called on Johnson to instead adopt a “much simpler list system” – consisting of just a red and green list – “so people can make decisions with certainty”.

[Dominic Cummings pushed through award of £580k Covid deal to Vote Leave ally](#)
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Travel expert Paul Charles, director of the PC Agency consultancy, said he expected further changes to the rules, claiming “high level” sources had told him the amber plus and green watchlist categories would also be dropped. “There needs to be more simplicity and a reduced testing regime,” he said.

Given health restrictions are a devolved matter, it will be up to the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to decide whether

to follow suit – though they do often maintain a uniform approach.

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Supermarkets

Call for action as UK driver shortage hits supermarket shelves

Situation likely to continue unless government does more to tackle issue, suppliers warn



A delivery lorry outside a Tesco Express store in central London.
Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

A delivery lorry outside a Tesco Express store in central London.
Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Gwyn Topham

@GwynTopham

Tue 3 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Gaps on supermarket shelves are likely to continue for several months unless the government does more to tackle the labour crisis hitting haulage firms, suppliers have warned.

Logistics and hauliers' organisations said August would be a pinch point in the shortage as workers take summer breaks, while firms offering bonuses and sign-on fees to recruit drivers were not helping matters.

The shortage of qualified HGV drivers, worsened by Brexit and Covid, has left wholesalers unable to get goods to shops, with [major dairy producer Arla on Friday](#) admitting it could not get milk to about a quarter of supermarkets last week.

Shane Brennan, chief executive of the Cold Chain Federation, said the issue was getting worse: "We're firefighting right now. We have got a lot of vacancies but also a lot of workers on holiday. We've got a short-term summer problem. We're going to have interruptions on the shelves – we're resigned to that."

Rona Hunnisett, of Logistics UK, said there was "a pinch point with holidays. These guys have been working flat out since the start of the pandemic."

She urged consumers to be patient and not overbuy: "There is plenty of stock in the supply chain, in all the warehouses. And plenty of fresh homegrown produce."

Tesco is among firms that are offering incentives of £1,000 or more to lure HGV drivers to work for it. Rod McKenzie of the Road Haulage Association said firms were offering "big bucks" and signing-on fees to drivers. "This is a real problem because all they are doing is buying talent from somewhere else. They are not creating talent," he said.

"We may be paying them more, which is a good thing, but we need new drivers. My challenge to the companies is: why not spend some money on recruiting and training new drivers?"

Dairy UK said collection of milk from farms had continued "despite hauliers being under considerable strain", while many staff working in the dairies themselves were absent because of the "pingdemic". Dr Judith Bryans, the organisation's chief executive, said the government should bring forward skilled worker visas for HGV drivers and dairy processing to help recruit

staff, adding: “This is an evolving situation that the sector will continue to monitor closely.”

Some Sainsbury’s stores were among those hit by milk outages but the supermarket said only some lines were affected and large quantities were still being delivered daily. A spokesperson said: “We are working hard to ensure customers can find what they need. While we might not always have the exact product a customer is looking for in every store, large quantities of products are being delivered to stores daily and our colleagues are focused on getting them on to the shelves as quickly as they can.”

Brennan said the problem would be worse at Christmas. “It’s been obscured by the pingdemic but that was the superficial problem rather than the ongoing problem – that we are chronically short of the drivers we need at every stage of the supply chain,” he said.

“We’ve seen a massive exodus of non-UK labour during the pandemic and we don’t know if they are able to come back.”

James Bielby, chief executive of the Federation of Wholesale Distributors, said an aluminium supply issue meant products such as soft drinks and beer were scarce, while Brexit-related labour shortages were affecting fresh goods such as meat and milk. “It’s going to get worse before it gets better,” he warned.

“Structural challenges remain and they’ll remain as long as there’s no intervention from government,” he said.

Retailers said there had only been “minor disruption” to supply chains but backed calls for urgent government action. Andrew Opie, director of food and sustainability at the British Retail Consortium, said: “Government must rapidly increase the number of HGV driving tests taking place, fill gaps by providing visas for EU HGV drivers, and also look for a longer-term solution to this issue.”

Logistics UK urged the government to extend an incentive scheme for employers to hire apprentice drivers.

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Hopes UK trial will allay pregnant women's Covid vaccine concerns

Researchers aim to determine optimal gap between doses as well as explore potential side-effects in more detail

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There is evidence that suggests the Delta variant of Covid-19 poses a greater risk to pregnant women than previous forms of the virus did. Photograph: Dann Tardif/Getty Images

There is evidence that suggests the Delta variant of Covid-19 poses a greater risk to pregnant women than previous forms of the virus did. Photograph: Dann Tardif/Getty Images

Nicola Davis Science correspondent

@NicolaKSDavis

Tue 3 Aug 2021 01.01 EDT

The optimal vaccination schedule to protect pregnant women against Covid-19 is to be explored in a UK clinical trial researchers hope will also allay concerns about getting the jab.

Last week, Prof Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, chief midwifery officer for England, urged expectant mothers to get vaccinated as soon as possible, with evidence suggesting the Delta variant poses a significantly greater risk to pregnant women than previous forms of the virus.

A clinical trial called Preg-CoV has been launched to help determine the best gap between doses for pregnant women as well as exploring in greater detail potential side-effects and the impact on babies – something the researchers hope will offer reassurance.

“Pregnant women do have an increased risk of severe Covid-19, of hospitalisation, of intensive care admission, of death, and they have an increased risk of delivering prematurely, compared to pregnant women without Covid-19,” said Paul Heath, chief investigator of the trial and professor of paediatric infectious diseases at St George’s, University of London.

“For that reason we really do need to make sure that when we are vaccinating pregnant women we are doing so in the most optimal way to ensure they are best protected.”

Asma Khalil, lead obstetrician for the trial and professor of obstetrics and maternal fetal medicine at St George’s said that while the UK Covid vaccination programme had been a success, uptake has been low among pregnant women.

According to research in her own hospital, “among pregnant women who’ve given birth between March this year until beginning of July, less than one third – 28% – of women who were eligible according to the guidance actually received [at least one dose of] the Covid vaccine” during pregnancy, said Khalil.

That is despite no safety concerns being raised by real-world data from more than 130,000 pregnant women in the US and 52,000 in England.

“Pregnant women are still concerned because pregnant women were not included in initial Covid vaccine trials,” said Khalil.

In the first phase of the Preg-CoV trial, the team hope to recruit 600 pregnant women, aged between 18 and 44, from 13 sites across England.

Two groups of 200 unvaccinated pregnant women at different gestation times will be randomised both with respect to whether they receive a Moderna or Pfizer/Biontech jab and to whether they are given their second dose four to six weeks or at 8-12 weeks after the first dose.

Participants will not know which Covid jab they are given, added Heath, while a routine vaccination to protect against whooping cough will also be included in the schedule so that participants are not aware which dosing regime they are following.

A third group of about 100 pregnant women will be given one dose of a Covid jab at 28-34 weeks gestation, with the second dose of the same vaccine given after delivery, while the fourth group of 100 women will already have had their first dose of any Covid jab before or very early in pregnancy and will get the second dose of the same vaccine.

All the women will have follow-up visits and blood tests, and fill in an electronic diary to help the researchers monitor any potential vaccine side-effects. The team will also track outcomes for the babies up to 12 months of age to explore safety and impact on their development.

However, experts note there is no evidence of harm to babies: rather, the jabs are beneficial as they reduce the chances of pre-term birth or stillbirth, while

antibodies can cross the placenta, helping to protect the child against Covid.

Heath said the trial would “fill in the gaps” in current knowledge about vaccinating pregnant women with the Covid jabs. The first results on potential side-effects are expected towards the end of the year and on immune response data in the first quarter of next year.

“I think there will be some lessons learned from this pandemic,” said Khalil. “And one of them is that we should consider including pregnant woman at a relatively early stage for vaccine trials.”

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Ministers to update NHS Covid app to ‘reduce disruption’

From Monday, app will only instruct people to isolate if contact occurs within two days of positive test, rather than five days

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The DHSC said the update did not impact the sensitivity of the app or change the risk threshold, and would result in the same number of high-risk contacts being advised to self-isolate. Photograph: True Images/Alamy

The DHSC said the update did not impact the sensitivity of the app or change the risk threshold, and would result in the same number of high-risk contacts being advised to self-isolate. Photograph: True Images/Alamy

Jessica Elgot Chief political correspondent

@jessicaelgot

Mon 2 Aug 2021 15.46 EDT

Ministers are to radically alter the NHS Covid-19 app in order to reduce the number of people instructed to isolate after they have been in contact with someone who tests positive, in the latest move to combat the numbers of people in quarantine.

From Monday, the app will instruct contacts to isolate only if they have been close to someone in the two days leading up to a positive test, rather than the current five-day threshold.

The change is a significant shift of No 10 policy, which had said there were no plans to change the way the app operated or tweak its sensitivity to address the “pingdemic”.

A Department of Health and Social Care source said the change was based on public health advice and would bring the app in line with the test and trace service. The department, however, has not published any specific new guidance or study on asymptomatic transmission to back up the change.

Labour said the tweaks to the app were a sign that ministers could not control infection rates. The shadow health minister, Liz Kendall, said: “The government has allowed infections to spiral out of control, leaving hundreds of thousands of people forced to self-isolate every day. Their response is not to drive down infections but instead quietly change the app that helps to keep us safe.

“This is yet another Covid U-turn from ministers at a time when the public need clarity and certainty – not chaos and mixed messages. It’s shambolic and they must get a grip.”

The alert is based on an algorithm that uses Bluetooth to track those who have been within 2 metres of someone with the disease for 15 minutes or more, but also check-in data at venues including bars and restaurants.

Ravi Gupta, professor of clinical microbiology at the University of Cambridge, said there was evidence to support the move. “There are reports that the incubation period is shorter for Delta, likely due to its faster replication,” he said. “I would support this move as a compromise given the current pragmatic approach to Covid-19 control in the UK.”

It comes amid reports that people are ditching use of the app in droves, and DHSC said it was urging people to continue to use the app now the change had been made.

The number of people contacted by the app reached record levels in the week to 21 July, according to the latest data, with more than 685,000 people told to self-isolate.

Yet evidence is growing that the public is making less use of the app – only 6.6m check-ins were recorded in total in the week ending 21 July, a 47% drop compared with the week ending 30 June.

DHSC said the update did not impact the sensitivity of the app, or change the risk threshold, and would result in the same number of high-risk contacts being advised to self-isolate.

The health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), said: “We want to reduce the disruption that self-isolation can cause for people and businesses, while ensuring we’re protecting those most at risk from this virus. This update to the app will help ensure that we are striking the right balance.

“It’s so important that people isolate when asked to do so in order to stop the spread of the virus and protect their communities.”

[End of furlough will increase UK unemployment by 150,000, says thinktank](#)
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The health department said the app had prevented thousands of potential infections, despite the outcry over the numbers isolating. Advice is due to change on 16 August, meaning those who have been fully vaccinated will no longer be required to isolate.

DHSC said the app prevented up to 2,000 cases a day in July and more than 50,000 cases overall, assuming there was 60% compliance with the app, preventing an estimated 1,600 hospital admissions.

Dr Jenny Harries, the chief executive of UK Health Security Agency, said the technology should still be used to fight the virus.

“I strongly encourage everyone, even those fully vaccinated, to continue using the app. It is a lifesaving tool that helps us to stay safe and to protect those closest to us as we return to a more familiar way of life.”

Steve Turner, Unite’s assistant general secretary for manufacturing, said the change of guidance still falls short of the union’s calls for the government to urgently rethink its decision not to exempt the automotive and steel sectors from self-isolation rules: “We simply cannot have a situation, for example, where a blastfurnace is shut down because workers are stuck at home, testing negatively daily, but forced to self-isolate,” he said.

“UK workers must not lose out because the government’s reopening of the economy is incoherent.”

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China authorities to test all Wuhan's 11 million residents amid new Covid cases

Eight cases reported in city where coronavirus first emerged in 2019

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Eight cases have emerged in Wuhan, the original epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic. Photograph: Getty Images

Eight cases have emerged in Wuhan, the original epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic. Photograph: Getty Images

[Helen Davidson in Taipei](#)

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 3 Aug 2021 01.33 EDT

Chinese officials have ordered all 11 million residents of Wuhan to be tested for Covid-19, after new cases emerged in the city for the first time in more than a year.

On Tuesday the national health commission reported eight cases in Wuhan, the city where Covid-19 was first detected in late 2019, before spreading around the world.

The cases – three of which were symptomatic and five asymptomatic – were among 84 new cases reported across [China](#) in the 24 hours to Monday evening. On Tuesday, Wuhan health official Li Tao said they were “swiftly launching comprehensive nucleic acid testing” of all 11 million residents.

[Millions under strict lockdown in China after Covid outbreak](#)

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They are believed linked to a [growing outbreak of the Delta variant](#) that has reached more than 20 cities, across more than a dozen provinces in recent weeks, including the capital Beijing and flood-hit Zhengzhou. Millions of people have been confined to their homes as the country tries to contain its largest coronavirus outbreak in months with mass testing and travel curbs.

Wuhan’s cases, which include seven reported on Monday detected among the city’s migrant workers, are the first local transmissions in the city since it contained the world’s first major Covid-19 outbreak in 2020.

In January last year the city was [put under a strict lockdown which went for 76 days](#). The restrictions on Wuhan and its population alarmed the world, but when the virus spread they were soon replicated by numerous countries as a key outbreak response measure.

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‘No one’s invincible’: fresh mask mandates and rising Delta cases hit California

A surge in San Francisco infections prompts indoor masking, but experts predict high vaccination rates will keep most out of hospitals



A waiter serves a customer a beer in San Francisco, where some bars are beginning to require proof of vaccination or a negative Covid test as cases rise again. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

A waiter serves a customer a beer in San Francisco, where some bars are beginning to require proof of vaccination or a negative Covid test as cases rise again. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

[Erin McCormick](#) in San Francisco

Tue 3 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

A surge in Covid-19 infections, driven by the highly contagious Delta variant, has prompted [San Francisco](#) and six other counties in California's Bay Area to reimpose mask mandates for indoor spaces, less than two months after experts in the highly vaccinated region celebrated what they hoped would be a return to normal.

In recent days, San Francisco's infection rates have surged to nearly 20 times what they were at their lowest point in June and two of the city's hospitals have reported that more than 200 of their own workers have tested positive for the virus.

"It teaches us that no one is invincible," said Dr Peter Chin-Hong, an associate dean at UCSF who specializes in infectious diseases.

The surge in cases comes as [California](#) and the nation have seen continued increases in infections, with federal officials acknowledging that "the war has changed" and the new Delta variant is as contagious as chicken pox.

The return to mask wearing sees the San Francisco Bay Area [join other parts of the state](#), including Los Angeles and Sacramento, that have already reimposed mandates as cases climb across the state.

New California cases have jumped from fewer than 900 a day at the end of May to more than 9,000 a day now, according to [state data](#). Nationally, new cases hit a low point in late June of about 12,000 per day, but they have now shot up to more than 78,000 a day, according to [data](#) from the New York Times.

[US reaches Biden's 70% first-shot goal as threat to unvaccinated people grows](#)

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Chin-Hong was among those who thought the fact that San Francisco had vaccinated 77% of eligible residents would protect it against future surges.

“At the time the state reopened, we felt invincible. But now we know we’re not,” he said.

However he predicts that high vaccination rates mean the city will avoid the huge surges in hospitalizations that have hit states like Missouri and Louisiana, where far fewer residents are vaccinated.

“We’re not filling the hospitals,” he said. “A year ago, a large number of these cases would have been admitted to the hospitals. Now people are getting symptoms of a cold.” If you’re vaccinated, he said, “you’re not going to end up on a ventilator in the hospital dying”.

Chin-Hong believes cases will level off as residents begin to reinstate masking and a few of the other precautions they had been practicing a few months ago.

Research has shown the Delta variant now makes up [more than 84% of all California cases](#), while California’s statewide reopening on 15 June meant greater social contact. Recent research shows that vaccinated people can spread the Delta virus, although they are less likely to get it and become seriously ill.

[Uber and Google are latest among tech firms to delay reopening as Delta variant spreads](#)

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Health officials say that unvaccinated residents are being hit far harder than those who have taken the vaccine and stress that getting immunized is by far the most effective strategy for preventing hospitalization and death.

“The vaccine continues to be our best way to protect ourselves, our families and our communities. Indoor masking is a temporary measure that will help us deal with the Delta variant, which is causing a sharp increase in cases,” said Dr Naveena Bobba, San Francisco’s acting health officer, in a [statement](#) on Monday. “We know increases in hospitalizations and deaths will follow.”

Several [major tech firms](#), including Google, Uber, Apple and Netflix, recently backtracked on plans to reopen their sprawling offices out of

caution.

On Friday, the San Francisco health department released [data](#) showing case rates among those who haven't received the full course of vaccinations are more than twice those among fully vaccinated residents, while hospitalization rates for unvaccinated patients who get the virus are eight times higher.

"The data we are seeing shows vaccines are highly effective in protecting people from severe illness and hospitalizations due to Covid-19, even as we see some breakthrough cases," said Dr Grant Colfax, director of health. "Getting vaccinated continues to be your best protection."



An ice cream parlor in the greater Los Angeles area, where an indoor mask mandate has also recently returned. Photograph: Myung J Chun/Los Angeles Times/REX/Shutterstock

The daily case totals for San Francisco are even higher than the peak of last summer's Covid surge, when daily totals reached 131 cases per day. The city is now reporting 198 new cases per day – nearly 20 times what it was seeing at its low point in mid-June, when it recorded only 10 new cases per day, according to [data](#) from the city's health department.

An [analysis by the San Francisco Chronicle](#) found the surge was partially driven by increased cases among millennials, adults aged 25 to 39. The Chronicle found that cases among that age group jumped from 35% of all new cases in May to 50% now.

Hospital officials at the University of California, San Francisco, confirmed that they had detected 183 cases among employees, while Zuckerberg San Francisco general hospital reported that 55 of its employees were out of work after recently testing positive. Both hospitals say the cases seem to be reflective of spread in the larger community and most did not stem from exposures inside the hospitals.

Of the 183 UCSF workers who tested positive, 153 had been vaccinated and 30 had not. Only two have been hospitalized – including one who was vaccinated and one who was not. None of the 55 cases at Zuckerberg San Francisco general hospital have resulted in hospitalizations.

UCSF officials said if it weren't for the fact that more than 90% of their employees were vaccinated, they would probably be seeing much higher infection rates among their campus population of 35,000, given the high rates of spread in the community.

Cristina Padilla, public relations officer for Zuckerberg San Francisco general hospital, agreed.

“The cases among hospital staff are reflective of what’s happening in the broader community as cases have been rising,” she said. “Breakthrough cases were and still are expected. We know vaccines won’t completely prevent infections, but they are very effective at making hospitalizations and death preventable.”

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US reaches Biden's 70% first-shot goal as threat to unvaccinated people grows

CDC director issues new warning as cases rise: 'Covid-19 is clearly not done with us'



A pharmacy technician administers the Pfizer Covid vaccine in St Petersburg, Florida, on 30 July. Photograph: Octavio Jones/Reuters

A pharmacy technician administers the Pfizer Covid vaccine in St Petersburg, Florida, on 30 July. Photograph: Octavio Jones/Reuters

[Richard Luscombe in Miami](#)
[@richlusc](#)

Mon 2 Aug 2021 20.41 EDT

At least 70% of adults in the US have now received at least one Covid-19 vaccination shot, the White House announced on Monday, reaching a target Joe Biden originally said he had hoped to achieve by 4 July.

The administration reported the news in a tweet hailing “[Milestone Monday](#)” by Cyrus Shahpar, the government’s Covid-19 data director, who said the seven-day average of people receiving their first dose – 320,000 – was the highest since the Independence Day holiday.

[Crowded Lollapalooza music festival could bring cascade of Covid cases, experts warn](#)

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Health and government officials have in recent days painted the resurgence of coronavirus as a “[pandemic of the unvaccinated](#)”, highlighting that areas of the country with the most spread were those with lower than average vaccination rates, and almost all hospitalizations and deaths are now among those declining to be vaccinated.

“Communities that are fully vaccinated are generally faring well,” Dr Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said, noting that “breakthrough” infections in vaccinated people were rare.

But with unvaccinated people increasingly at risk, Walensky said at the White House coronavirus team briefing on Monday: “While we desperately want to be done with this pandemic, Covid-19 is clearly not done with us, and so our battle must last a little longer.”

The US is seeing an average of 72,000 new cases of Covid-19 per day, [higher than last](#) summer’s surge, when vaccines were still in development and new daily cases reached 68,700, according to the CDC. Cases remain a lot lower than the pandemic peak of early January 2021, which saw more than 250,000 new cases a day as vaccines were starting to become more widely available.

On Monday, a state-by-state study published by the Kaiser Family Foundation revealed that less than 1% of fully vaccinated people

experienced a breakthrough infection, ranging from 0.01% in Connecticut to 0.9% in Oklahoma.

Additionally, more than 90% of all cases, and more than 95% that resulted in hospitalizations or deaths, were among unvaccinated people, the study found.

Figures published by the CDC on Monday added that 49.7% of the US population who were eligible were now fully vaccinated, and that demand for the shots had increased by 28% from a week ago to reach a new daily average of 673,185 vaccinations administered.

A senior Biden administration official said on Friday that [the White House was frustrated](#) by what it saw as “alarmist” reporting by some media outlets over the Delta variant, and was worried that coverage of rare breakthrough cases could lead to more vaccine hesitancy.

The president had said he wanted the country to reach 70% at least partially vaccinated by the early July holiday, but the White House coronavirus response coordinator, Jeff Zients, [admitted in June](#) that the country would need “a few extra weeks” because of reluctance by those aged 18 to 26 to get a shot.

The pandemic, meanwhile, continued to bite around the US on Monday.

In Florida, the nation’s current Covid-19 hotspot, which accounts for one on five new cases, hospitals are experiencing what one official described as a “horrifying” surge in younger patients. That included many under 12, too young to be eligible for the vaccine, and teenagers who are eligible but have chosen not to take it.

The rise in pediatric hospitalizations came as the state continues to lead the nation in new infections, having [set records over the weekend](#) for both the highest number of daily cases and hospital admissions since the pandemic hit the US in January 2020.

It was also alarming education chiefs, including the superintendent of the country’s fourth largest school district, Miami-Dade, who is considering

defying a [ban on mask mandates](#) imposed by Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis, last week.

Schools in the county return from the summer break on 23 August and Alberto Carvalho said his district would "follow the science" in determining whether to require staff and students to wear masks.

"We have been a district that's well informed by science, by medical experts and public health experts and that will not change," the superintendent told the Miami Herald's editorial board. The district's advisers include Vivek Murthy, the US surgeon general, who graduated high school in Miami.

Pediatric hospitals are reporting higher numbers of admissions as the highly contagious Delta variant of Covid-19 spreads, according to the Florida Hospital Association (FHA).

"What you heard last spring about this virus mostly targeting seniors and those with pre-existing conditions is not true today," said Mary Mayhew, the group's president and chief executive.

"The virus has a new target, the unvaccinated and younger people. Previously healthy people from their teens to their 40s are now finding themselves in the hospital and on a ventilator."

The mayor of Broward county, Steve Geller, said on Monday that the sharp rise in cases and hospital admissions was worrying.

"Unfortunately, Dade and Broward counties lead the nation in hospitalizations. The numbers are doubling every 10 or 11 days, this is horrifying," [he told Miami's ABC News affiliate](#).

At least 33 hospitals in Florida reported "critical staffing shortages" on Monday, the Associated Press reported, with Miami's Jackson Memorial hospital adding 58 intensive care beds to cope with the Covid-19 surge.

The US Department of [Health](#) and Human Services said 10,389 patients were hospitalized with Covid-19 in Florida on Monday. Several counties said they were adding testing sites.

Other states, especially Mississippi and Louisiana, were also reporting upswings in cases and hospital admissions.

Lauren Aratani contributed reporting

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Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

[The long read](#)

The lost history of the electric car – and what it tells us about the future of transport

Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

To every age dogged with pollution, accidents and congestion, the transport solution for the next generation seems obvious – but the same problems keep coming back

by [Tom Standage](#)

Tue 3 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

In the 1890s, the biggest cities of the western world faced a mounting problem. Horse-drawn vehicles had been in use for thousands of years, and it was hard to imagine life without them. But as the number of such vehicles increased during the 19th century, the drawbacks of using horses in densely populated cities were becoming ever more apparent.

In particular, the accumulation of horse manure on the streets, and the associated stench, were impossible to miss. By the 1890s, about 300,000 horses were working on the streets of London, and more than 150,000 in New York City. Each of these horses produced an average of 10kg of manure a day, plus about a litre of urine. Collecting and removing thousands of tonnes of waste from stables and streets proved increasingly difficult.

The problem had been building up for decades. A newspaper editor in New York City said in 1857 that “with the exception of a very few thoroughfares, all the streets are one mass of reeking, disgusting filth, which in some places is piled to such a height as to render them almost impassable to vehicles”. As well as filling the air with a terrible stench, the abundance of horse manure turned streets into muddy cesspools whenever it rained. An eyewitness account from London in the 1890s describes the “mud” (the accepted euphemism among prudish Victorians) that often flooded the Strand, one of the city’s main thoroughfares, as having the consistency of

thick pea soup. Passing vehicles “would fling sheets of such soup – where not intercepted by trousers or skirts – completely across the pavement”, spattering and staining nearby houses and shop fronts. Manure collected from the streets was piled up at dumps dotted around major towns and cities. Huge piles of manure also built up next to stables and provided an attractive environment for flies.

All of this was bad for public health. The board of health’s statisticians in New York City found higher levels of infectious disease “in dwellings and schools within 50 feet of stables than in remoter locations”, the New York Times reported in 1894. According to one turn-of-the-century calculation, 20,000 New Yorkers died annually from “maladies that fly in the dust”, clear evidence of the dangers posed to health by reliance on horses. To make matters worse, horses were frequently overworked, and when they dropped dead, their bodies were often left rotting on the streets for several days before being dismembered and removed, posing a further health risk. By the 1880s, 15,000 dead horses were being removed from the streets of New York City each year.

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Paradoxically, the advent of the steam locomotive and the construction of intercity railway links, starting in the 1830s, had helped make the problem worse. Faster and more efficient transport between cities increased the demand for rapid transport of people and goods within them, which required a greater number of horse-drawn vehicles. “Our dependence on the horse has grown almost *pari passu* [step for step] with our dependence on steam,” noted one observer in 1872. The result was more horses, more manure – and steadily worsening congestion. One observer in 1870 wrote that Broadway in Manhattan was “almost impassable” at some times of the day. And when the traffic did move, it was deafening, as metal horseshoes and iron-rimmed wheels clattered over uneven surfaces. Straw was sometimes strewn on roads outside hospitals, and some private houses, to reduce the din.

Pollution, congestion and noise were merely the most obvious manifestations of a deeper dependency. An outbreak of equine influenza in North America in October 1872 incapacitated all horses and mules for

several weeks, providing a stark reminder of society's reliance on animal power. The New York Times noted "the disappearance of trucks, drays, express-wagons and general vehicles" from the streets. "The present epidemic has brought us face to face with the startling fact that the sudden loss of horse labor would totally disorganize our industry and commerce," noted the Nation. Horses and stables, the newspaper observed, "are wheels in our great social machine, the stoppage of which means injury to all classes and conditions of persons, injury to commerce, to agriculture, to trade, to social life".

Yet societies on both sides of the Atlantic continued to become steadily more dependent on horses. Between 1870 and 1900, the number of horses in American cities grew fourfold, while the human population merely doubled. By the turn of the century there was one horse for every 10 people in Britain, and one for every four in the US. Providing hay and oats for horses required vast areas of farmland, reducing the space available to grow food for people. Feeding the US's 20 million horses required one-third of its total crop area, while Britain's 3.5 million horses had long been reliant on imported fodder.

Horses had become both indispensable and unsustainable. To advocates of a newly emerging technology, the solution seemed obvious: get rid of horses and replace them with self-propelling motor vehicles, known at the time as horseless carriages. Today, we call them cars.

In recent years this transition has been cited as evidence of the power of innovation, and an example of how simple technological fixes to seemingly intractable problems will show up just when they are needed – so there is no need to worry about climate change, for instance. Yet it should instead be seen as a cautionary tale in the other direction: that what looks like a quick fix today may well end up having far-reaching and unintended consequences tomorrow. The switch from horses to cars was not the neat and timely technological solution that it might seem, because cars changed the world in all kinds of unanticipated ways – from the geography of cities to the geopolitics of oil – and created many problems of their own.

Much of the early enthusiasm for the automobile stemmed from its promise to solve the problems associated with horse-drawn vehicles, including noise,

traffic congestion and accidents. That cars failed on each of these counts was tolerated because they offered so many other benefits, including eliminating the pollution – most notably, horse manure – that had dogged urban thoroughfares for centuries.

But in doing away with one set of environmental problems, cars introduced a whole set of new ones. The pollutants they emit are harder to see than horse manure, but are no less problematic. These include particulate matter, such as the soot in vehicle exhaust, which can penetrate deep into the lungs; volatile organic compounds that irritate the respiratory system and have been linked to several kinds of cancer; nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide; and greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide, that contribute to climate change. Cars, trucks and buses collectively produce around 17% of global carbon dioxide emissions. Reliance on fossil fuels such as petrol and diesel has also had far-reaching geopolitical ramifications, as much of the world became dependent on oil from the Middle East during the 20th century.



Horse-drawn and motorised traffic in London in the 1930s. Photograph: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

None of this could have been foreseen at the dawn of the automobile age. Or could it? Some people did raise concerns about the sustainability of

powering cars using non-renewable fossil fuels, and the reliability of access to such fuels. Today, electric cars, charged using renewable energy, are seen as the logical way to address these concerns. But the debate about the merits of electric cars turns out to be as old as the automobile itself.

In 1897, the bestselling car in the US was an electric vehicle: the Pope Manufacturing Company's [Columbia Motor Carriage](#). Electric models were outselling steam- and petrol-powered ones. By 1900, sales of steam vehicles had taken a narrow lead: that year, 1,681 steam vehicles, 1,575 electric vehicles and 936 petrol-powered vehicles were sold. Only with the launch of the Olds Motor Works' Curved Dash Oldsmobile in 1903 did petrol-powered vehicles take the lead for the first time.

Perhaps the most remarkable example, to modern eyes, of how things might have worked out differently for electric vehicles is the story of the Electrobat, an electric taxicab that briefly flourished in the late 1890s. The Electrobat had been created in Philadelphia in 1894 by Pedro Salom and Henry Morris, two scientist-inventors who were enthusiastic proponents of electric vehicles. In a speech in 1895, Salom derided "the marvelously complicated driving gear of a gasoline vehicle, with its innumerable chains, belts, pulleys, pipes, valves and stopcocks ... Is it not reasonable to suppose, with so many things to get out of order, that one or another of them will always be out of order?"

The two men steadily refined their initial design, eventually producing a carriage-like vehicle that could be controlled by a driver on a high seat at the back, with a wider seat for passengers in the front. In 1897 Morris and Salom launched a taxi service in Manhattan with a dozen vehicles, serving 1,000 passengers in their first month of operation. But the cabs had limited range and their batteries took hours to recharge. So Morris and Salom merged with another firm, the Electric Battery Company. Its engineers had devised a clever battery-swapping system, based at a depot at 1684 Broadway, that could replace an empty battery with a fully charged one in seconds, allowing the Electrobats to operate all day.

In 1899 this promising business attracted the attention of William Whitney, a New York politician and financier, who had made a fortune investing in electric streetcars, or trams. He dreamed of establishing a monopoly on

urban transport, and imagined fleets of electric cabs operating in major cities around the world, providing a cleaner, quieter alternative to horse-drawn vehicles. Instead of buying cars, which were still far beyond the means of most people, city dwellers would use electric taxis and streetcars to get around. But realising this vision would mean building Electrobats on a much larger scale. So Whitney and his friends teamed up with Pope, maker of the bestselling Columbia electric vehicle. They formed a new venture called the Electric Vehicle Company, and embarked on an ambitious expansion plan. EVC raised capital to build thousands of electric cabs and opened offices in Boston, Chicago, New Jersey and Newport. In 1899 it was briefly the largest automobile manufacturer in the US.

But its taxi operations outside New York were badly run and failed to make money. Repeated reorganisations and recapitalisations prompted accusations that EVC was an elaborate financial swindle. The industry journal the Horseless Age, a strong advocate of petrol-powered vehicles, attacked the firm as a would-be monopolist and said electric vehicles were doomed to fail. When news emerged that EVC had obtained a loan fraudulently, its share price plunged from \$30 to \$0.75, forcing the firm to start closing its regional offices. The Horseless Age savoured its collapse and cheered its failure to “force” electric vehicles on a “credulous world”.

In the years that followed, as more people bought private cars, electric vehicles took on a new connotation: they were women’s cars. This association arose because they were suitable for short, local trips, did not require hand cranking to start or gear shifting to operate, and were extremely reliable by virtue of their simple design. As an advertisement for Babcock Electric vehicles put it in 1910, “She who drives a Babcock Electric has nothing to fear”. The implication was that women, unable to cope with the complexities of driving and maintaining petrol vehicles, should buy electric vehicles instead. Men, by contrast, were assumed to be more capable mechanics, for whom greater complexity and lower reliability were prices worth paying for powerful, manly petrol vehicles with superior performance and range.

Two manufacturers, Detroit Electric and Waverley Electric, launched models in 1912 that were said to have been completely redesigned to cater to women. As well as being electric, they were operated from the back seat,

with a rear-facing front seat, to allow the driver to face her passengers – but also making it difficult to see the road. For steering they provided an old-fashioned tiller, rather than a wheel, which was meant to be less strenuous but was less precise and more dangerous.



A Detroit Electric automobile charging in 1919. Photograph: Granger Historical Picture Archive/Alamy

Henry Ford bought his wife, Clara, a Detroit Electric rather than one of his own Model Ts. Some men may have liked that electric cars' limited range meant that the independence granted to their drivers was tightly constrained.

By focusing on women, who were a small minority of drivers – accounting for 15% of drivers in Los Angeles in 1914, for example, and 5% in Tucson – makers of electric cars were tacitly conceding their inability to compete with petrol-powered cars in the wider market.

That year, Henry Ford confirmed rumours that he was developing a low-cost electric car in conjunction with Thomas Edison. "The problem so far has been to build a storage battery of light weight which would operate for long distances without recharging," he told the New York Times, putting his finger on the electric car's primary weakness. But the car was repeatedly delayed, as Edison tried and failed to develop an alternative to the heavy,

bulky lead-acid batteries used to power electric cars. Eventually, the entire project was quietly abandoned.

The failure of electric vehicles in the early 20th century, and the emergence of the internal combustion engine as the dominant form of propulsion, had a lot to do with liquid fuel providing far more energy per unit mass than a lead-acid battery can. But the explanation is not purely technical. It also has a psychological component. Buyers of private cars, then as now, did not want to feel limited by the range of an electric vehicle's battery, and the uncertainty of being able to recharge it.

In the words of the historian Gijs Mom, private cars in this period were primarily seen as “adventure machines” that granted freedom to their owners – and an electric vehicle granted less freedom than the petrol-powered alternative. “To possess a car is to become possessed of a desire to go far afield,” wrote one city-dwelling car enthusiast in 1903. Sales of electric cars peaked in the early 1910s. As internal combustion engines became more reliable, they left electric vehicles in the dust.

But as car ownership expanded dramatically during the 20th century, relying on oil turned out to have other costs. By the 1960s, American cars were, on average, three-quarters of a tonne heavier than those made in Europe and Japan, and their V8 engines had more than twice the engine capacity of the four-cylinder engines most prevalent elsewhere. As a result, they used a lot more fuel. An increasing proportion of that fuel came from imported oil. Imports, mostly from the Middle East, accounted for 27% of the US’s supply by 1973. In December that year the Middle Eastern members of Opec (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) cut off oil exports to the US in protest at its support for Israel in the Yom Kippur war. The price of oil surged, and the sudden reduction in supply resulted in higher petrol prices, the introduction of rationing, and long queues at gas stations. For the first time, American drivers realised they could not take the supply of petrol for granted. The oil shock led the government to introduce a national speed limit of 55mph, and fuel-economy standards that required US manufacturers to achieve an average fuel economy, across their entire product lines, of 18 miles per gallon by 1978, and 27.5 by 1985.

But American carmakers did little to change their products. By the late 70s, 80% of American-made cars still had V8 engines. In 1979, in a second oil shock, oil supplies from the Middle East were once again disrupted, this time as a result of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the outbreak the following year of the Iran-Iraq war. The actual production of oil barely fell, but prices soared and panic buying ensued. This second oil shock stimulated the demand for smaller cars.

Electric cars might have been expected to benefit from the concerns over the sustainability of gas-guzzlers. But electric-car technology had made little progress since the 1920s. The biggest problem remained the battery: lead-acid batteries were still heavy and bulky and could not store much energy per unit of weight. The most famous electric vehicles of the 1970s, the four-wheeled lunar rovers driven by American astronauts on the moon, were powered by non-rechargeable batteries because they only had to operate for a few hours.



Newly manufactured Tesla electric cars at the docks in Southampton.
Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty

On Earth, attempts to revive electric cars as commercial products failed to get off the ground – until the emergence in the 90s of the rechargeable lithium ion battery. By 2003, Alan Cocconi and Tom Gage, two electric-car

enthusiasts, had built an electric roadster called the tzero, powered by 6,800 camcorder batteries, capable of 0-60mph in less than four seconds and with a range of 250 miles. Tesla was founded to commercialise that technology.

Lithium-ion batteries have made the switch to electric cars possible, but because of tightening regulation of combustion-powered vehicles in order to address climate change, that switch now seems inevitable.

The automobile, having been introduced in part to address one pollution problem, has contributed to another one: carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels.

To what extent will electrifying road vehicles help address the climate crisis? Globally, transport (including land, sea and air) accounts for [24% of carbon dioxide emissions](#) from burning fossil fuels. Emissions from road vehicles are responsible for 17% of the global total. Of those emissions, about one-third are produced by heavy-duty, mostly diesel-powered vehicles (such as trucks and buses), and two-thirds by light-duty, mostly petrol-powered vehicles (such as cars and vans).

Switching to electric cars would thus make a big dent in global emissions, though the challenges of switching large trucks, ships and planes away from fossil fuels would remain. But it would not address other problems associated with cars, such as traffic congestion, [road deaths](#) or the inherent inefficiency of using a one-tonne vehicle to move one person to the shops. And just as the rise of the automobile led to worries about the sustainability and geopolitical consequences of relying on oil, the electric car raises similar concerns. The supply of lithium and cobalt needed to make batteries, and of the “rare earth” elements need to make electric motors, are already raising [environmental and geopolitical questions](#).

Lithium is quite abundant, but cobalt is not, and the [main source](#) of it is the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where around a quarter of production is done by hand, using shovels and torches. Conditions for miners are grim, and the industry is dogged by allegations of corruption and use of child labour. Once mined, cobalt is mostly refined in China, which also has the lion’s share of global lithium ion battery production capacity, and dominates production of rare-earth elements, too.

Geopolitical tensions have already led to disputes between China and western countries over the supply of [computer chips](#) and related manufacturing tools. So it is not hard to imagine similar disagreements breaking out over the minerals and parts needed to build electric vehicles. (This explains why Tesla has struck a deal with Glencore, a mining giant, to guarantee its supply of cobalt, and also operates [its own battery factories](#), inside and outside China. It also explains why some companies are looking to deep-sea mining as an alternative source of cobalt.)

Moreover, history suggests it would be naive to assume that switching from one form of propulsion to another would mean things would otherwise continue as they were; that is not what happened when cars replaced horse-drawn vehicles. Some people say it's time to rethink not just the propulsion technology that powers cars, but the whole idea of car ownership.

The future of urban transport will not be based on a single technology, but on a diverse mixture of transport systems, knitted together by smartphone technology. Collectively, ride-hailing, [micromobility](#) and on-demand car rental offer new approaches to transport that provide the convenience of a private car without the need to own one, for a growing fraction of journeys. Horace Dediu, a technology analyst, calls this “unbundling the car”, as cheaper, quicker, cleaner and more convenient alternatives slowly chip away at the rationale for mass car ownership.

Its ability to connect up these different forms of transport, to form an “internet of motion”, means that the smartphone, rather than any particular means of transport, is the true heir to the car. The internet of motion provides a way to escape from the car-based transport monoculture that exists in many cities. That should be welcomed, because the experience of the 20th century suggests that it would be a mistake to replace one transport monoculture with another, as happened with the switch from horses to cars. A transport monoculture is less flexible, and its unintended consequences become more easily locked in and more difficult to address.

As combustion engines are phased out, and cars, trains and other forms of ground transport go electric, direct emissions should not be a problem. (Electric transport will only be truly emission-free when it is powered by

renewable power from a zero-carbon grid.) But transport systems will produce another form of potentially problematic output: data. In particular, they will produce reams of data about who went where, and when, and how, and with whom. They already do.



Discards from various bike-sharing services in Wuhan, China, in 2018.
Photograph: VCG/VCG via Getty Images

In an infamous (and since deleted) blog post from 2012, entitled Rides of Glory, Uber analysed its riders' behaviour to identify the cities and dates with the highest prevalence of one-night stands, for example. The post caused a furore, and was seen as symptomatic of the unrestrained "tech bro" culture that prevailed at Uber at the time. But it highlights a broader point. Shared bikes and e-scooters also track who went where, and when, for billing purposes.

The companies that operate mobility services are keen to keep this data to themselves: it helps them predict future demand, can be useful when preparing to launch new services, and can also be used to profile riders and target advertising. Cities want to track the position and usage of shared bicycles and e-scooters so they can adjust the provision of bike lanes, compare levels of usage in low-income and high-income neighbourhoods, check that vehicles are not being used in places where they should not be,

and so forth. For this reason, dozens of cities around the world have adopted a system called the Mobility Data Specification (MDS). At present, MDS only covers bicycles and e-scooters, though it could be expanded to cover ride-hailing, car-sharing and autonomous taxi services in the future.

[The curse of 'white oil': electric vehicles' dirty secret](#)

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But mobility-service providers and privacy groups are concerned that MDS lets cities track individuals, and could, for example, allow the police to identify people who attend a demonstration or visit a particular location. They also worry that the foundation that oversees MDS will not store the data securely. It is not difficult to imagine the sort of things that an authoritarian regime might do with such data.

All of this suggests that personal-mobility data is likely to become a flashpoint in the future. This may seem like an esoteric concern, but the same could have been said of worries about carbon dioxide emissions, which are just as invisible, at the dawn of the automotive era. And unlike the people of that time, those building and using new mobility services today have the chance to address such concerns before it is too late.

*This is an edited extract from *A Brief History of Motion: From the wheel to the car to what comes next*, published by Bloomsbury on 18 August*

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Generational inequality

‘You’re not snowflakes’: baby boomers answer gen Z’s biggest questions



‘Why do all boomers find windfarms so ugly?’ Tayo Idowu (*centre*) and three other baby boomers take on young people’s queries below. Composite: David Levene/The Guardian; Getty

‘Why do all boomers find windfarms so ugly?’ Tayo Idowu (*centre*) and three other baby boomers take on young people’s queries below. Composite: David Levene/The Guardian; Getty

It can feel as if the generation gap is wider than ever – but not when people really talk. Here, four sixtysomethings offer advice to those in their teens and 20s



Sirin Kale

Tue 3 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

We live in an era in which, for the most part, the generations do not mix frequently. Grandparents are visited occasionally; young people seek the freedom of independent living as early as possible. On social media, intergenerational warfare is commonplace, as members of gen Z (those born between the mid-90s and the early 10s) criticise older people for hoarding wealth, while baby boomers bemoan the perceived sensitivity of the younger generation.

But what would happen if baby boomers gave the TikToking young adults of today an insight into their thinking – and threw some life advice into the bargain? To that end, we assembled a panel of baby boomers – Tayo Idowu, 64, a marketing director from London; Liz Richards, 68, a retired nurse from Derby; Paul Gibson, 63, an accountant from Arundel, West Sussex; and Maggie Tata, 65, a carer from London – to answer gen Z's questions (even the tongue-in-cheek ones).

What do you admire in younger people today?

Caitlin, 22, Norwich

Idowu: I admire them for their tenacity.

Tata: And also for their adaptability. I don't know how they do it. They can suck everything in and still manage to cope. And they're willing to take risks. Their courage is just amazing.

Gibson: I admire them for their confidence in IT. They're probably the first digital natives, aren't they? They've embraced all the possibilities of technology.

Richards: For me, it's how they've coped with the pandemic. I think they've had the worst time of any group, really. Obviously, not from the sickness and death point of view, but the fact that when you're young your life is going out, meeting other people, doing all of that. They've had to do without a lot of it.



'Their courage is just amazing' ... Maggie Tata. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Do you think young people are overly sensitive and privileged?

JD, 21, south Wales

Idowu: It depends how you define sensitive or privileged. I know some young people and for them the thought of going out to work in the summer holiday is like: maybe after I've rested for a long time. In our day, the idea of getting a paper round was the norm. So, definitely in terms of privilege, for some of them I can feel that.

Gibson: I think they're much more aware and have a greater empathy and understanding of people's journeys. So I use words like sensitive in a positive way, not in [a Piers Morgan snowflake way](#), because they're not snowflakes. They're resilient and adaptable and more aware of their world's issues.

Why do you hate selfies?

Bethany, 22, London

Richards: I don't hate selfies! I love them. Some of the best pictures I've got are selfies. But sometimes it's constant selfies – and then it gets a bit tedious.

Idowu: We don't hate selfies per se. It's the volume of them.

Would you have chosen to live your life differently if you were born in our generation?

Diana, 19, Aberdeen

Gibson: If I were starting over, I would take more risks. My early life was fairly risk-free. I wanted to go to Cambridge, which I did. My father was an accountant and it was expected that I would become an accountant, so I did. I would take more risks with my life and with my career, seek out more diversity. I think I lacked that in the earlier years. And perhaps I wouldn't have one linear career, which is what I've done, but several different careers. Because inside I feel like a writer, but on the outside I look like an accountant. If I were starting over, I'd give that writer a little bit more space and that accountant a little less space. I think I'd be a richer person for that.



‘If I were starting over, I would take more risks’ ... (*clockwise from top left*) Tayo Idowu, Paul Gibson, Maggie Tata and Liz Richards. Photograph: Supplied image

What is your best advice for how to achieve financial security?

Judith, 23, Barcelona

Tata: Oh God, that’s a good one. Invest, invest, invest! Multiple streams of income. That’s it. You can’t just have a nine-to-five job any more. You have to do lots and lots of different things.

Idowu: As early as you can, get a life insurance policy. Make sure it’s a whole-life insurance policy, because that way, if something happens to you, you have something substantial to leave to your offspring. Also, look outside your main career for income. I think it’s called a “side hustle” now, right? I used to go to police auctions – this was way before eBay – and buy things, then advertise them in the classified ads. If you can, get on the property ladder as soon as possible.

Gibson: For me, saving has always been very important, but I went to university at a time when there was no student debt and housing was

affordable. But – and it's a huge “but” – if you can, start a pension early. It's called compounding. If you start a pension at 21 and retire at 65, that pension has been going for 45 years, and a very small sum can become a substantial sum. [The state pension](#) isn't enough to live on, sadly. But I recognise how that advice is just not practical for so many people who are paying eye-watering amounts of rent.

Why do you always get to the airport so early?

Jamie, 20, Southport

Idowu: Because the tyres might burst. What I mean by that is that we have to think ahead and plan for possible eventualities. A lot of generation Z, they leave everything to literally the last minute and don't think about the possibility of anything going wrong. But we were brought up in a generation where things could go wrong. Technology wasn't reliable. Cars weren't as reliable. Electrical stuff wasn't reliable. So we had to leave plenty of time in case things didn't go right. That's carried over in our attitude.

How do you even use a paper map?

Nic, 23, London

Tata: I don't even have a clue, because I just go on Google and type what I have to find. That's one advantage with technology for me, because I can't see properly anyway.

Idowu: We had A-Zs and they were very simple. Say for instance you're going to Grange Road in Croydon, you would look up Grange Road at the back ... [Idowu patiently explains how to use an A-Z.] It's not that difficult.



‘Look outside your main career for income. I think it’s called a “side hustle” now, right?’ ... Tayo Idowu. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

What mistakes did your generation make – and what can gen Z learn from them?

Hayley, 23, Northampton

Richards: When I was younger, the attitudes towards women who got pregnant out of marriage were awful. The world sort of fell in on them. It was also hypocritical, because there would often be illegitimate children in families, but everyone pretended that wasn’t the case. Another big mistake I lived through was [how we treated gay people](#). People had to pretend and it caused such pain and distress.

Idowu: Another mistake we made was listening to everything our teachers and parents told us and believing it. Because half the time they were saying things knowing full well they weren’t going to happen. I think today’s children are a lot more challenging of what adults tell them, which is a good thing.

Tata: Yes. We didn’t have a choice, really. But they can find information out for themselves. I’m grateful for their free spirit, because we were just told

that we had to do as we were told.

Gibson: For me, it's our generation's failure to act on climate change. We know what we need to do, but we lack the individual and political leadership to change the way we live and protect the environment. Our failure will be felt for generations to come.

Why do all boomers find windfarms so ugly?

Louis, 23, Glasgow

Idowu: Well, I wouldn't want to live next to one, put it like that. I wouldn't say I find them ugly. I think I find them intriguing. I actually prefer windfarms to solar panels. They look a bit more elegant, if I may say. Having these massive solar panels looks strange in the beautiful countryside.

What is the difference between pennies, shillings and pounds?

Jonathan, 24, London

Gibson: I think the question might be getting at the fact we hold on to old ways of doing things. When I'm in the car, I can't do litres of fuel per 100km, because I don't know what those numbers mean. I still use miles per gallon.

Have you changed opinion politically since you were a young adult?

Atila, 17, London

Richards: I have definitely got more conservative, with a small C, as I've got older. [She laughs.] I had some fairly radical thoughts as a young person. You try not to, but you do harden your opinions on certain things – and sometimes that's a good thing, because you won't be swayed by other people. But some people think whatever they think is absolutely right and they sort of keep on at you, until you agree with them.

Idowu: I've softened. I've gone from more of a Marxist-Leninist stance to a soft-left stance.

Gibson: I've not changed. I was a great supporter of Jeremy Corbyn and I think I would have been as a young person. Obviously, it didn't go well, but a lot of the ideas he came up with were ahead of their time and, in the next five years, we might begin to follow them.



'I have definitely got more conservative, with a small C' ... Liz Richards.

Do you believe that gen Z aren't able to buy homes because we are lazy and don't work hard enough?

Rebecca, 21, Lincoln

Richards: Absolutely not! [She looks horrified.] My sons aren't gen Z, they're in their 30s, but they can't buy homes. House prices have been crazy over the past 20 years.

Idowu: I bought my first house for £23,000. Nowadays, that would probably be £300,000 – and instead of finding a £3,000 deposit, you'd need £30,000.

What is your generation's obsession with Facebook?

Hannah, 23, Cambridge

Tata: I am on Facebook, but I'm not obsessed with it. I just use it to connect with my family and friends worldwide. I don't really go and post things in it, unless there's an occasion like a family wedding and some people couldn't come.

Much divides us, but one trend unites our youth cultures: can we agree on platform shoes?

Caroline, 22, Washington DC

Idowu: I love my platform shoes. I had beautiful patent leather and suede ones that I bought from a shop called Ravel. I don't know where they are now, but platforms are definitely a big thumbs up from me.

What is your view on TikTok?

Shriya, 24, India

Idowu: I think it's a massive and amazing tool for creativity, because you have to encapsulate so much in such a short space of time.

What do you think of the rising awareness of mental health – and do you wish you had the same awareness when you were younger?

Grace, 20, Exeter

Tata: Definitely! Definitely. It was taboo for us growing up. We couldn't even talk about mental health. People would be locked up in what we used

to term “mental homes” and that was it. It’s so good that mental health is being addressed now and it’s not a taboo.

Do you still like boiled sweets?

MJ, 23, London

Idowu: I’m still partial to cola cubes. There’s a sweet shop in Greenwich that sells old-fashioned sweets. Whenever I pass it, I go in to buy some cola cubes.

What is the one thing you wish you had known before you were 30?

Abbie, 22, Bristol

Idowu: If I’d known before 30 that as you get older you have less energy, I would have had my children much earlier. Because what you don’t want is when you take your son to school and people say: “Is that your grandad?”

Richards: Getting your foot on the property ladder if you possibly can is a good idea. Paying into a pension. It’s awfully boring and, of course, when you’re at that age, you never think you will need it, because you never think you will be old, but age does come. And travel. Meet new people, educate yourself about different cultures. That will set you up for being a decent, balanced person.

Gibson: I think I would say to an under-30, or myself at that age, to be bold. When you look back, failure isn’t a terrible thing. It’s actually quite often a positive thing. You can learn from it, you can grow from it. When I was under 30, I was very anxious about failing and I think I missed out on some of the things we’ve been talking about – travelling and meeting new people and getting new experiences. I wouldn’t worry about failing. I would be bold.

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‘Now it’s continuous noise’: Italy’s Crusoe adjusts to life off his island

It is more than three months since Mauro Morandi left Budelli after living alone there for 32 years



Mauro Morandi in his new home in La Maddalena. ‘The experience of Budelli is over.’ Photograph: Sophia Seymour

Mauro Morandi in his new home in La Maddalena. ‘The experience of Budelli is over.’ Photograph: Sophia Seymour

[Angela Giuffrida in La Maddalena](#)

Tue 3 Aug 2021 04.52 EDT

Every morning, Mauro Morandi woke up to the uninterrupted sea view that only he was privy to. Immersed in nature, he was intimately in tune with the dawn sounds and habits of the wildlife that surrounded his home, a former second world war shelter on Budelli, the Mediterranean island where he had lived alone for more than 30 years.

Now the 82-year-old is adjusting to life in a one-bedroom apartment next to a shop with a Sky TV sign outside, surrounded by neighbours and with only a glimpse of the ocean in between the gaps separating the buildings opposite on nearby La Maddalena, the largest of an archipelago of seven islands off the north coast of Sardinia, [Italy](#).

Speaking from his new home, Morandi said: “I became so used to the silence. Now it’s continuous noise ... music, motor scooters, people ... it distracts you so much you don’t have time to think.”

More than three months have passed since Morandi, a former PE teacher from the northern Italian city of Modena, [was forced to leave Budelli](#), where he had come to know every rock, tree and animal species on the rugged islet.

He had expected the public’s fascination in his life to wane after his departure; instead, it has grown more fervent. Fans from around the world continue to send him messages. A recent one read: “Mauro, the master of solitude.” Journalists still call him for quotes, or in anticipation of writing a book or making a film.

“I thought that after leaving Budelli, nobody would talk about me any more,” he said. “Instead, you journalists keep pestering.”

Asked why he thinks the intrigue in him is so intense, Morandi replied: “It’s as if people delegated me to do something they would never have the courage to do.”

Morandi had always dreamed of living on an island.

Exasperated by consumerism, politics and other aspects of society, in 1989 he decided to set sail for Polynesia in search of his idyll. But his journey to

the South Pacific was scuppered soon after leaving mainland Italy due to a technical hitch on his catamaran, forcing him to anchor in La Maddalena.

[Map of Budelli](#)

He decided to work for some time on the island to pay off the cost of the boat and fund the rest of the trip. But then, after clapping eyes on the nearby uninhabited Budelli, Morandi realised his paradise was much closer to home.

In a twist of fate, the island's caretaker was about to retire, and so Morandi abandoned the trip to Polynesia, sold the boat and took over the role.

For the next two decades he guarded Budelli without trouble, clearing its paths, keeping its beaches pristine and teaching summer day-trippers about its ecosystem.

Tourists have been banned from walking on the island's pink beach, from where sand was often pilfered, and swimming in the sea since the 1990s, but can visit during the day via boat and are permitted to walk along a path behind the beach. They were often surprised to come across the sole inhabitant, although word soon got around, earning Morandi the nickname Robinson Crusoe after the castaway in Daniel Defoe's novel.

Among the intrigued visitors over the years were the former Formula One boss Flavio Briatore and his then girlfriend, Naomi Campbell. The pair came in search of a meal with Morandi. The most he could offer was a coffee. They declined and left.

Food was delivered to him by boat from La Maddalena, and a homemade solar system powered his lights, fridge and internet connection. During winter, when there are no visitors, he spent his days collecting firewood, reading and sleeping.

Morandi's life continued in much the same rhythm until the private company that owned the island went bankrupt. Plans to sell it in 2013 to Michael Harte, a businessman from New Zealand who pledged to keep Morandi on as caretaker, were thwarted amid protests and an intervention by the Italian

government. In 2016, a Sardinian judge ruled the island be put back into public hands.



The authorities plan to turn Budelli into a hub for environmental education.
Photograph: Robertharding/Alamy

Until his departure in late April, Morandi was entwined in a lengthy tussle with La Maddalena national park authorities, which now manage Budelli, as he fought eviction. The authorities, which plan to turn Budelli into a hub for environmental education, accused him of making adjustments to his home on the island without the required permits and said he had to go.

The two sides appeared to have reached a compromise earlier this year, with Morandi told he might be able to return as custodian once works on the island were completed. “The director of the park suggested leaving before the works started, in return for him trying to get me a contract to return as custodian,” said Morandi. “The works were supposed to begin a week after I left, but they still haven’t started.”

Budelli is now guarded by CCTV cameras. Morandi recently went back there to collect some belongings. “It was a disaster,” he said. “The beaches were trampled on. I knew this would happen. There is nobody there any more to educate the tourists.”

Still, as he reflects over his life, Morandi accepts that maybe it was time to leave Budelli. “Last winter was very harsh. It rained a lot, there was hardly any sun to power the electricity ... for three months I ate out of tins. I’m 82 and life there became more of a challenge. I have a bad leg and it was a struggle to walk – if I had fallen on one of the rocks, there would have been nobody there to help me.”

The last few months have given him time to nurture a new hobby – he takes photos of the architecture on La Maddalena – as well as to repair relations with his three daughters, who live in Modena. “I’ll never regret the choice I made but it wasn’t an easy one,” he said. “My daughters were adults when I went to live on Budelli and I thought they accepted it ... it was only later that I realised they hadn’t. One daughter didn’t speak to me for four years, we only recently started talking again.”

The day after our meeting, Morandi left for Modena to visit his family. “The experience of Budelli is over,” he said.

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Romance books

Her Heart for a Compass by Sarah Ferguson review – Mills & Boon debut is chaste good fun

The romance of her heroine's 'rebellious' red hair is much more of a feature in the Duchess of York's historical novel than sex



'By heavens, she had real spirit' ... Sarah Ferguson. Photograph: Mills & Boon/PA

'By heavens, she had real spirit' ... Sarah Ferguson. Photograph: Mills & Boon/PA



[Alison Flood](#)

Mon 2 Aug 2021 19.01 EDT

She is a spirited, Titian-haired, freckled beauty, whose curls just won't quit. While initially submitting to the strictures of high society and the tribulations of the marriage market, she endures a pasting from the press before emerging triumphant, throwing off the weight of expectations to become her true self. And write a children's book.

The heroine of the Duchess of York's debut novel for adults, Lady Margaret Montagu Douglas Scott, bears no small resemblance to its author, in both looks and life story. Her Heart for a Compass is out on Tuesday from romance publisher Mills & Boon, but readers hoping for the sexy shenanigans usually found in the publisher's output will be disappointed. While Margaret indulges in a handful of kisses, and at one point has a man "adjusting his kilt, swearing under his breath", the pleasures she experiences are all very much above the waistline.

['There's an art to it': with one sold every 10 seconds, what's Mills & Boon's secret?](#)

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Ferguson writes in an author's note that the novel was "15 years in the making", beginning when she discovered that her great-great-great-grandparents were the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch, and that their second daughter, Margaret, was a redhead with a birthday "within a few days" of Ferguson's own. The real details of Margaret's own life are scant; Ferguson depicts her as a woman who is initially the toast of London, described in gossip rags as a "Titian-haired breath of fresh Scotch air". In the novel, Margaret's hair is frequently featured: it's variously a "rebellious red mop", a "sodden mass of rebellious curls", a "scarlet flag, wild curls whipping around her face", and "burnished autumn leaves". One admirer opines: "She was very naive but, by heavens, she had real spirit, too, no one could doubt that."

But the press vilifies her over her refusal to marry a man she loathes, so Margaret goes to live in exile in Ireland, helping the poor and starting to write her own children's stories. She makes her way in New York as a journalist and philanthropist, and eventually marries the man who has loved her for years.

Ferguson has written the novel with veteran Mills & Boon author Marguerite Kaye, whose recent output (*A Forbidden Liaison With Miss Grant*; *The Truth Behind Their Practical Marriage*) does not shy away from the horizontal. Here, Margaret is given some clinches, including with an Anglican priest who inspires her work with the poor ("time seemed to stop, along with her breath, until he gave a soft sigh, and she lifted her face and surrendered her lips to his"), and with the man who eventually wins her heart ("deep, starving kisses, adult kisses, their tongues tangling, hands clutching and clinging"). But Bridgerton this is not.

Instead, running to 500-plus pages, *Her Heart for a Compass* sees Margaret realising that she doesn't need to "conform to the rules set down by society", that a Buccleuch woman doesn't need a strategic marriage, and that her despairing cry, "no one seems to care that underneath I'm an actual person", isn't altogether true.

The novel veers around somewhat in tone, from archaic – Margaret's priest informs her that "you cannot have imagined I would have kissed you in such a manner unless my intentions were honourable" – to the entirely

contemporary – “Ha! That’s nothing,” says our heroine – but Her Heart for a Compass is nonetheless well-researched, and a glimpse into the strictures of life as a pampered, rich, upper-class woman. It wears its research lightly, with intriguing forays into topics such as Victorian bathing dresses, and the Queen’s predilection to “pour her tea from one cup to another until it was adequately cooled”. It’s an odd fit with the Mills & Boon imprint, however, where novels tend to run to 200-odd pages, and are considerably steamier.

The Guardian was turned down for an interview with Ferguson, but the duchess [told Town and Country](#) magazine that “I have thrown my voice into each line and I’m very proud”, while Kaye said that “right from the start it was clear she wasn’t going to be sitting in the back seat on this … She had a clear vision for what the story was that she wanted to tell, and she wanted to be involved in every stage of the process.”

The lack of sex in the novel, according to Town and Country, is “in deference to historical sexual mores”, a reason that doesn’t usually stop Mills & Boon writers. Ferguson is promising this will change in her second novel. “I decided I would remove bodice-ripping from this book, number one. But I’m now on book number two with Marguerite … and I have got a real bodice-ripping coming for you. This is going to make Fifty Shades of Grey just a walk in the park,” she told the magazine. However, according to Kaye, the duchess – spirited, Titian-haired, unconventional – is just “teasing”.

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Therapy via Zoom should make mental healthcare available for all – it hasn’t

Hannah Zeavin

Good quality remote treatment is still proving to be expensive and in short supply



‘The patient is meant to click, scroll and type their way to a better state of mind at the expense of deeper, open-ended work and systemic solutions.’
Photograph: Newscast Online Limited/Alamy

‘The patient is meant to click, scroll and type their way to a better state of mind at the expense of deeper, open-ended work and systemic solutions.’
Photograph: Newscast Online Limited/Alamy

Tue 3 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

Whether with a private therapist on Zoom, through an app that daily reminds us to log our emotions, or in a back-and-forth with a chatbot, teletherapy is often proffered as a catch-all salve for our current mental healthcare crises.

Remote treatment is touted as an efficient way to reach more patients in a time of extreme difficulty, an intimate intervention that can scale.

During the on-and-off mandated social distancing that has marked the past 18 months of the pandemic, teletherapy has shed its status as a minor form of care to become, at times, the only thing on offer. The [popularity of remote therapeutic sessions](#) has soared in the US and the “users” we once called patients are [increasingly comfortable](#) with such practices, and in some cases even prefer them.

Having a therapist see a patient on Zoom or condensing treatment to self-tracking and AI interfaces may be recent innovations, but the broad notion that technology and distanced processes will solve our woes is nothing new. We have been turning to forms of technology to deliver mental health services for more than 100 years. From 19th-century written cures delivered by post and ad hoc telephone hotlines, to the continuing elusive work to create an AI shrink, there have been numerous mediated, networked and remote relationships used in attempts to fix longstanding problems with therapeutic provision. While those problems have obviously evolved over time, they have also stayed relatively the same: good care is expensive and in short supply, and barely begins to meet an overwhelming demand.

While versions of teletherapy have emerged over and over again during the past century on medium after medium, it is also accurate to say that it has finally arrived. The corporate health industry has taken notice. Online therapy companies such as Talkspace are being traded publicly on Nasdaq. Amazon has continued to push its Halo wearable tech, which uses a built-in microphone [to perform machine listening](#), with nudges to users to be more “positive”. And white-collar workers in the US are treated to a barrage of company-sponsored reminders to use the mindfulness and wellness apps bundled [in their benefits](#).

Corporate teletherapy apps promise convenience and efficacy – metrics positioned at the centre of these interventions ever since the [invention of the telephone](#). Privacy, confidentiality and the therapeutic relationship itself all come second.

[England is sleepwalking towards a two-tier health system | Richard Vize](#)

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Too frequently on these platforms the aim becomes simply “mental fitness”. Fitness is always fitness *for* something: corporate teletherapy frequently deploys the logic that it’s all done in the service of people working better, harder and, yes, more efficiently. Some apps even offer therapy without the therapist: either in chatbot form or as a type of self-tracking. The patient is meant to click, scroll and type their way to a better state of mind at the expense of deeper, open-ended work and systemic solutions.

For the practitioner, corporate teletherapy presents care work in gig economy form, exacerbating longstanding issues with [clinician burnout](#). If patients are promised on-demand texting and are enticed with the promise of shorter sessions, all of that additional labour is performed by overburdened workers dislocated from a traditional intimacy with their patients. Before the pandemic, psychologists and social workers were increasingly economically precarious; and over the past year, 10% of mental healthcare workers in the UK [earned nothing](#), according to one survey of practitioners across the sector. Others are turning to corporate platforms for a living, earning lower fees than they would in private practice. For patients, this reduction isn’t passed on: fees stay roughly the same as those in private practice, despite claims to the contrary and the radical shift in the nature of the therapeutic experience.

Yet, since a mainstream emergence in the 1960s, remote treatment has [been justified](#) by a promise of democratisation. Simply, such treatments can go where traditional mental health treatment can’t or won’t, levelling the vast disparities in access to help. Augmenting therapy with silicon, or telephone cables before that, is supposed to have – somehow, miraculously – also changed the number of clinicians available, protected those in the field and lowered fees, while increasing access to care and destigmatising it. Sometimes this does work: while largely these initiatives have been based in single communities, or are used in pre-existing therapeutic relationships, some have indeed scaled and radically altered our care landscape, as in the widespread adoption of [suicide hotlines](#).

But, in the middle of what has been called the “[Uberisation of mental health](#)”, making mental healthcare remote, Zoomed or clicked does not

instantly open it up to everyone. If it did, we would have had therapy for all a long time ago.

- Hannah Zeavin is a history and English teacher at University of California, Berkeley, and author of [The Distance Cure: A History of Teletherapy](#)
 - In the UK, the charity [Mind](#) is available on 0300 123 3393 and [Childline](#) on 0800 1111. In the US, [Mental Health America](#) is available on 800-273-8255. In Australia, support is available at [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 22 4636, [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14, and at [MensLine](#) on 1300 789 978
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OpinionImmigration and asylum

Attacking lifeboats may seem like a new low, but the right craves a ‘migrant crisis’

Daniel Trilling

It will take more than the RNLI’s surge in donations to end the demonisation of asylum seekers



‘Nigel Farage’s recent criticism of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution rightly drew attention for its demagoguery.’ Photograph: Kirsty O’Connor/PA

‘Nigel Farage’s recent criticism of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution rightly drew attention for its demagoguery.’ Photograph: Kirsty O’Connor/PA

Tue 3 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

If your politics involves frequent attacks on beloved national institutions, no matter how much you claim to be defending them from subversion, you risk looking like you simply dislike them. That is a problem for rightwing culture warriors who purport to stand up for a patriotic, socially conservative majority, against a tiny liberal elite that maintains an iron grip on the levers of power.

After several years of increasingly outlandish rhetorical assaults – on the BBC, the National Trust, the England football team – it has begun to seem as if the culture warriors are starting to run aground.

Nigel Farage's [recent criticism](#) of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution – for allegedly providing a “taxi service” to people crossing the Channel in small boats – rightly drew attention for its demagoguery. His choice of words was resonant. In Italy, in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis, accusations from populists and the far right – that humanitarian charity ships were providing a *taxis del mare*, a “sea taxi” service, to migrants escaping the hell of Libya – smeared the reputations of volunteers and helped pave the way for a government crackdown on rescues.

Yet it was notable that most rightwing talking heads did not join in Farage's attack. Several ministers, perhaps wary of colleagues who ended up looking like [shameless opportunists](#) during Euro 2020 – failing to condemn England fans who booed the team for taking the knee at the start of the tournament and then draping themselves in red and white by the end – were quick to show their support for the RNLI. They were wise to: the fact that the volunteer lifeboat service has received a [3,000% boost in donations](#) since Farage's comments shows that it has broad public support.

[Donations to RNLI rise 3,000% after Farage's migrant criticism](#)

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It's too early to celebrate yet, however. The attacks are likely to keep on coming because they have become essential to the political tactics of the right. Committed ideologues, for one thing, genuinely believe the liberal elite, out of step with the values and beliefs of the British population, continues to hold power, despite Boris Johnson's thumping election victory in 2019.

If you are unwilling to accept that historical shifts such as [the spread of liberal social attitudes](#) – or the fact that young people, increasingly shut out from stable careers and housing, are [more amenable to socialist ideas](#) – reflect changes in society at large, then it follows that these must be the product of underhand influences: of “wokeness”, or “cultural Marxism”, or a biased establishment.

To compound this, there is a thriving media economy founded on rightwing outrage. Attacks on the “loony left” and moral panics about issues such as migration are hardly new to the rightwing press; indeed, the Daily Mail included the RNLI in a recent report on “migration madness” in the Channel. Stories about asylum seekers being [accommodated in supposedly plush hotels](#), with the implication that British people are being short-changed, have become a tabloid staple.

But for newer rightwing media outlets, hysteria about the great liberal conspiracy is even more essential. The [travails of GB News](#) are a case in point. After the channel’s ratings flopped, it drafted in Farage as a presenter in an effort to reverse its fortunes – showing how reliant this section of the media are on populist provocation.

For the government, meanwhile, culture war politics may prove essential if it is to keep its current electoral coalition together. The exact meaning of the term “culture war” is often disputed, but it’s best thought of as a political technique for gathering a disparate group of people with conflicting, even contradictory, interests into your camp. Pick a divisive social issue, make your position on it a badge of identity, and try to make other people do so too.

The polarising effect of the Brexit referendum, which – in Westminster discourse at least – divided the country into two rival camps of leavers and remainers, was skilfully deployed as a culture war battle by the [Conservatives](#) in the 2019 election.

[I've been watching Nigel Farage on GB News so you don't have to. Consider yourself lucky | Catherine Bennett](#)

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Since then, and given the claim that Brexit is now “done”, the right has been searching for other issues to fulfil a similar role. As tensions in the Conservatives’ new base come to the fore – between, say, voters in the north of England who are keen to see the government “levelling up” through investment in infrastructure, and traditional Tories in the south who want a low-tax, low-spending state – the search will most likely continue. The party may find it gains diminishing returns, since poll after poll reveals that the public is not naturally divided along culture war lines.

But culture wars, even when they fail to take root, are more than just harmless noise. Although much of the right has steered clear of attacking the RNLI itself, boats in the Channel are being used as a litmus test for the government’s commitment to a hard-right agenda. The cover story of last week’s Spectator declared we were fighting “Britain’s new migrant crisis”. If Johnson meant “all that stuff he said in recent years about ‘taking back control’,” thundered Douglas Murray, “he must get control of this country’s borders. In the realm of sovereignty, nothing matters more.”

Even if this doesn’t push the government further to the right, it ends up taking the attention away from its existing policies – which, one might say, are extreme in their own right. The borders bill currently making its way through parliament is only one of a series of hardline law and order measures (along with the heavily criticised policing bill) that Johnson’s government is rolling out. The rightwing outrage machine does real damage to politics even when its demands aren’t met, because it narrows debate and makes it harder to challenge the decisions taken by people with real power.

To see what I mean, think about the questions we could have been asking over the past few weeks when instead we’ve been debating the extent to which it’s acceptable to save lives at sea. Why are people so desperate to reach the UK that they will step into dinghies, and what is our role in creating those conditions? Why does one of the world’s richest countries have an asylum system that forces children to sleep in disused offices and leaves cases unanswered for up to a decade?

Who gains from playing British citizens off against migrants? The public defence of the RNLI is heartening, but it needs to be the beginning of something, rather than the end.

- Daniel Trilling is the author of Lights in the Distance: Exile and Refuge at the Borders of Europe and Bloody Nasty People: the Rise of Britain's Far Right
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OpinionLabour

The balance of power among Labour's factions is shifting under Keir Starmer

Sienna Rodgers

With various left and soft left groups on the sidelines, the party's right is in the ascendant



Keir Starmer meeting A-level students last month at St Mary's catholic academy, Blackpool. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

Keir Starmer meeting A-level students last month at St Mary's catholic academy, Blackpool. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

Tue 3 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

Recent developments in the Labour party have once again highlighted how, despite the leader's promise to end factionalism, internal divisions are alive and well. The party agreed last month to [ban four groups](#), leading to the automatic expulsion of members – expected to reach 1,000, though this figure hasn't been confirmed – on the party's left. The groups are Socialist

Appeal, a Trotskyist group considered a successor to Militant; Labour Against the Witchhunt, which believes many Labour antisemitism claims were fabricated for political reasons; Labour in Exile Network, a defender of those suspended or expelled from Labour; and Resist, the project of ex-MP Chris Williamson, intended to become a registered political party.

These now-proscribed organisations are small and you could forgive even the most active Labour member for never having heard of some of them. But, by and large, the Labour left opposed the bans: they believe that a “guilt by association” rule is unfair and suspect this is only the start of a slippery slope, with bigger groups critical of [Keir Starmer](#) at risk of being ousted next. A panel has been set up to consider further proscriptions. It is worth taking this moment to review how, as a new leadership has changed Labour’s internal dynamics, key organisations within Labour have been bolstered and others weakened.

[Keir Starmer’s aide warns: Labour has lost touch with target voters](#)
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The factional group with the most influence in the party now is perhaps Labour First. Its secretary, Luke Akehurst, [topped the ballot](#) in [last year’s elections](#) for the national executive committee (NEC), and former full-time national organiser Matt Pound plays a key role in the leader’s office. This traditional “old right” organisation, with links to trade unions and local government, was founded in the 80s and its raison d’être has always been to fight the “organised hard left”. It once acted quite independently of Blairites, but tensions melted away under Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership and this unity has held up well. For young activists, Blairite-Brownite divides are a historical irrelevance; for older members on the party’s right, the possibility that Corbynites could return to power in Labour is still keenly felt.

The day after Starmer’s election, [Labour to Win](#) was unveiled. It brings together the two main strands of Corbyn-scepticism: Labour First and Progress, which was first established in 1996 to champion New Labour. Since the L2W launch, Progress has merged with Peter Mandelson’s Policy Network and become [Progressive Britain](#).

The three organisations have distinct purposes. Progressive Britain takes on a thinktank role, focusing on policy debates and research, while [Labour](#) First retains its original job of mobilising “moderate” members. Labour to Win performs a similar task, but has a broader appeal: rather than old right or Blairite, the umbrella group pitches itself as simply in favour of winning elections and moving on from Corbynism.

Momentum is the big Labour left rival to those organisations. Although its ability to influence decision-making at the top of the party drastically diminished with the election of Starmer, the group that sprang from Corbyn’s first leadership campaign still has a large membership, full-time paid staff and finds success in internal elections. It won five of the nine local party representative places up for grabs on Labour’s NEC in November. But its direction and aims have changed.

After co-founder Jon Lansman decided not to restand as chair last year, control was won by the Forward Momentum faction. Arguing that the activist network had been too top-down and too focused on “one last electoral push”, the newcomers were brought in by members on a promise to empower the grassroots. Alongside democratic initiatives like a [policy primary](#), in which members vote on proposals they would like to see the party adopt, the reformed Momentum has sought to steer its work away from internal Labour organisation – such as candidate selections and retaining control of local party executives – and towards extraparliamentary activities, such as evictions resistance campaigns.

[Angela Rayner: ‘We don’t want to be an opposition, we want to be a government’](#)

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Some on the Labour left – those who still prioritise holding on to power within the party wherever possible – are frustrated by this development. “What a waste of time,” one former Corbyn staffer sighed in response to recent news of Momentum’s [“refounding” process](#). But the outlook is bleak for Corbynites in this party under new management, so the switch in priorities is understandable. This also opens up an opportunity for the soft left, which should actually be the most powerful faction – with most of the membership in the same place as them – but is organisationally weak.

Open Labour, the soft-left organisation founded in 2015, only managed to get one of its two NEC member representative candidates elected. As a promoter of pluralism and a critic of infighting in a bitterly divided party, it is more challenging for Open Labour to attract either attention or funding from private donors. Then there is the Tribune group of Labour MPs, who put up three NEC candidates and returned none. They are supposed to represent the soft left of the parliamentary party, but Tribune's membership is politically diverse to the point of being ridiculous. It has been contesting internal elections but largely doesn't behave as a factional campaigning outfit, which is partly why soft-left MPs attend the meetings in parliament of Labour First, where they are briefed and can swap stories about how things are going in their local parties.

The best example of the soft left being organised is perhaps Starmer's shadow cabinet – but even here there are signs of it falling back, as the recent reshuffle saw figures to their right promoted. The Labour left is preoccupied with other tasks at the grassroots and with the split in the parliamentary party. The soft left is consistently under-funded and doesn't have the member data necessary to make a big splash, having backed Lisa Nandy rather than the winning leadership candidate last year. This leaves the party's right, working together under the Labour to Win umbrella, as the most influential faction in the party – and the most likely to shape Starmer's agenda as leader.

-
- Sienna Rodgers is editor of LabourList

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I don't like to boast – but even my blood is special

[Zoe Williams](#)



It's taken me 27 years to become a blood donor. Was I really put off by a few questions about sex?



Feeling the squeeze ... a donor gives blood. Photograph: Pixel-shot/Alamy

Feeling the squeeze ... a donor gives blood. Photograph: Pixel-shot/Alamy

Tue 3 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

At lockdown's very apex of misery, when all the novelty had passed and the sun wasn't shining, when nothing was open and you couldn't even remember what it was like when things were, Mr Z went into town to give blood. He came back high on his own genius. He had left the house with a legitimate purpose, and had had seven or eight conversations. Someone gave him an orange Club. He dined out on what he did for weeks, so long as you call telling me multiple times about the two separate people who gave him an isotonic drink "dining out".

So, obviously, then I wanted a go, but whenever it came to making an appointment, a mysterious force stayed my hand: they call it "guilt". I should have been giving blood regularly all my adult life, because I have a weird blood type, totally unreactive – anyone could use it. For all I know, a raccoon could use it. It's weirder than just O negative – it has a variation so rare that, when my sister was born, she was one of only five known weird-blood carriers, and they made a documentary about her, two Russians and two people in Texas. Then I was born and had the same thing, but that's not a documentary anybody needs to make twice.

Sadly for raccoons and all the injured people, the first time I went, I took against all the questions about sex, which struck me as rather judgmental, even though I could see perfectly well there might legitimate reasons to ask how many partners you'd had in the last three months. Maybe I was just scared. Either way, it was 1994, and I stalked out and never went back, so that's a quarter of a century's absolutely premium blood that went unharvested. Of course I feel bad.

[Hemosep: the machine set to revolutionise blood transfusions](#)

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Anyway, I swallowed all that and went to give blood. By that time, lockdown was over so there was very little frisson, but I still got a Club, and three weeks later, I got the call. They weren't interested in my variation and Netflix wasn't biting, but O negative is still a priority blood group and they wanted to book me every 16 weeks in perpetuity.

"Did you seriously just do that," asked Mr Z, "so that you could have more premium blood than me?"

"Yes," I told him. "What of it?"

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist.

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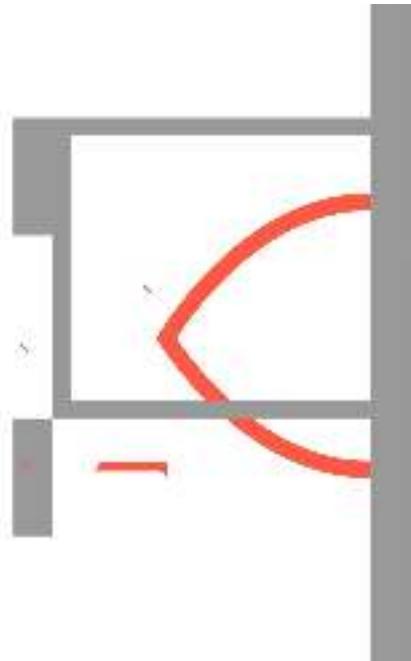
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[The Pegasus project](#)[Dubai](#)

Princess Latifa campaigner had ‘phone compromised by Pegasus spyware’

Human rights activist David Haigh targeted in attack suspected to have been ordered by Dubai



David Haigh said he was targeted days after he suddenly lost contact with Princess Latifa. Composite: Guardian/i-Images

David Haigh said he was targeted days after he suddenly lost contact with Princess Latifa. Composite: Guardian/i-Images

Dan Sabbagh Defence and security editor

Mon 2 Aug 2021 12.00 EDT

A British human rights campaigner and lawyer who was fighting to free Dubai's Princess Latifa had his mobile phone compromised by Pegasus spyware on 3 and 4 August 2020, according to a forensic analysis carried out by Amnesty International.

David Haigh is the first confirmed British victim of infiltration by Pegasus software, an attack suspected to have been ordered by Dubai, because of his connection with the 35-year-old princess, a daughter of the emirate's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed, and the Free Latifa campaign of which he was part.

At the time his phone was compromised, Haigh had been helping the legal team of Princess Haya, a wife of the sheikh, who is embroiled in a battle with the ruler of Dubai in the English courts over the custody of their young children.

Haya's own legal team were arguing, in part, that Sheikh Mohammed's treatment of Latifa meant that he should not be allowed to take control of the children. The case in the family courts is continuing.

Haigh, 43, said he was "horrified" by the idea his phone had been targeted, which he said came a few days after a year and a half of secret smartphone contact with Latifa, then held under house arrest in Dubai, had been suddenly lost.

The phone, Haigh said, contained dozens of messages and videos from Latifa, who had obtained a phone and made recordings from her bathroom, the only room where she could lock the door.

Some of the films, which described her plight, were later released by the Free Latifa campaign to BBC Panorama in February, including one in which the princess says: "The police threatened me that I'll be in prison my whole life and I'll never see the sun again."



Daughter of Dubai ruler, Princess Latifa Al Maktoum Composite: Guardian/EPA

Haigh said he believed the attack amounted to "state-sponsored harassment" and called on the UK government to investigate "all use of Pegasus software

on British soil”. The campaigner has also reported the incident to Devon and Cornwall police, where he lives, and the force has begun investigating.

Dubai did not respond to a request for comment on the targeting of Haigh’s device. But last week the United Arab Emirates, the federation of which Dubai is part, said claims that it had ordered any hacking were false.

“The allegations made by recent press reports claiming that the UAE is amongst a number of countries accused of alleged surveillance targeting of journalists and individuals have no evidentiary basis and are categorically false,” a statement from the country’s foreign ministry said.

Pegasus, made by NSO Group of Israel, [is powerful surveillance spyware](#) that the company says is licensed only to governments, to fight terrorism and serious and organised crime. It can steal and even delete the contents from a mobile – or turn on the microphone or camera covertly to act as a surveillance device.

NSO Group said it was “a technology company” and that it did not operate the Pegasus system or routinely have access to the data of its government customers. It did not respond directly to the alleged compromise of Haigh’s phone, but said in a statement it would “thoroughly investigate any credible proof of misuse of its technologies”.

A leaked list of 50,000 phone numbers that, since 2016, are believed to have been selected as those of people of interest by government clients of NSO contains numbers for journalists, human rights campaigners and political leaders.

Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based nonprofit journalism organisation, and Amnesty International initially had access to the list and shared access with 16 media organisations including the Guardian. The consortium believes the data indicates the potential targets that NSO’s government clients identified in advance of possible surveillance.

Quick Guide

What is in the Pegasus project data?

Show

What is in the data leak?

The data leak is a list of more than 50,000 phone numbers that, since 2016, are believed to have been selected as those of people of interest by government clients of NSO Group, which sells surveillance software. The data also contains the time and date that numbers were selected, or entered on to a system. Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based nonprofit journalism organisation, and Amnesty International initially had access to the list and shared access with 16 media organisations including the Guardian. More than 80 journalists have worked together over several months as part of the Pegasus project. Amnesty's Security Lab, a technical partner on the project, did the forensic analyses.

What does the leak indicate?

The consortium believes the data indicates the potential targets NSO's government clients identified in advance of possible surveillance. While the data is an indication of intent, the presence of a number in the data does not reveal whether there was an attempt to infect the phone with spyware such as Pegasus, the company's signature surveillance tool, or whether any attempt succeeded. The presence in the data of a very small number of landlines and US numbers, which NSO says are "technically impossible" to access with its tools, reveals some targets were selected by NSO clients even though they could not be infected with Pegasus. However, forensic examinations of a small sample of mobile phones with numbers on the list found tight correlations between the time and date of a number in the data and the start of Pegasus activity – in some cases as little as a few seconds.

What did forensic analysis reveal?

Amnesty examined 67 smartphones where attacks were suspected. Of those, 23 were successfully infected and 14 showed signs of attempted penetration. For the remaining 30, the tests were inconclusive, in several cases because the handsets had been replaced. Fifteen of the phones were Android devices, none of which showed evidence of successful infection. However, unlike iPhones, phones that use Android do not log the kinds of information

required for Amnesty's detective work. Three Android phones showed signs of targeting, such as Pegasus-linked SMS messages.

Amnesty shared "backup copies" of four iPhones with Citizen Lab, a research group at the University of Toronto that specialises in studying Pegasus, which confirmed that they showed signs of Pegasus infection. Citizen Lab also conducted a peer review of Amnesty's forensic methods, and found them to be sound.

Which NSO clients were selecting numbers?

While the data is organised into clusters, indicative of individual NSO clients, it does not say which NSO client was responsible for selecting any given number. NSO claims to sell its tools to 60 clients in 40 countries, but refuses to identify them. By closely examining the pattern of targeting by individual clients in the leaked data, media partners were able to identify 10 governments believed to be responsible for selecting the targets: Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Hungary, India, and the United Arab Emirates. Citizen Lab has also found evidence of all 10 being clients of NSO.

What does NSO Group say?

You can read NSO Group's [full statement here](#). The company has always said it does not have access to the data of its customers' targets. Through its lawyers, NSO said the consortium had made "incorrect assumptions" about which clients use the company's technology. It said the 50,000 number was "exaggerated" and that the list could not be a list of numbers "targeted by governments using Pegasus". The lawyers said NSO had reason to believe the list accessed by the consortium "is not a list of numbers targeted by governments using Pegasus, but instead, may be part of a larger list of numbers that might have been used by NSO Group customers for other purposes". They said it was a list of numbers that anyone could search on an open source system. After further questions, the lawyers said the consortium was basing its findings "on misleading interpretation of leaked data from accessible and overt basic information, such as HLR Lookup services, which have no bearing on the list of the customers' targets of Pegasus or any other NSO products ... we still do not see any correlation of these lists to anything

related to use of NSO Group technologies". Following publication, they explained that they considered a "target" to be a phone that was the subject of a successful or attempted (but failed) infection by Pegasus, and reiterated that the list of 50,000 phones was too large for it to represent "targets" of Pegasus. They said that the fact that a number appeared on the list was in no way indicative of whether it had been selected for surveillance using Pegasus.

What is HLR lookup data?

The term HLR, or home location register, refers to a database that is essential to operating mobile phone networks. Such registers keep records on the networks of phone users and their general locations, along with other identifying information that is used routinely in routing calls and texts. Telecoms and surveillance experts say HLR data can sometimes be used in the early phase of a surveillance attempt, when identifying whether it is possible to connect to a phone. The consortium understands NSO clients have the capability through an interface on the Pegasus system to conduct HLR lookup inquiries. It is unclear whether Pegasus operators are required to conduct HRL lookup inquiries via its interface to use its software; an NSO source stressed its clients may have different reasons – unrelated to Pegasus – for conducting HLR lookups via an NSO system.

Was this helpful?

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Following the leak, the company has come [under investigation in its home country](#) – although several governments as well as the UAE [have denied misuse of the technology](#).

The number used by Haigh last August does not appear on the list, although the time periods appear different. [More than 400 of the British numbers](#) listed have been linked to Dubai and the UAE, based on an analysis of the data, but they cover the period 2017 to 2019. Haigh's phone was targeted using Pegasus a year after that.

[A number belonging to Princess Haya, and eight of her associates](#), including a member of her legal team, do appear on the leaked list. Sheikh Mohammed

“emphatically denies” having selected for potential surveillance the persons listed, or having instructed others to do so.

Haigh became a human rights campaigner focused on the Gulf, and particular the UAE after becoming embroiled in a bitter legal battle. He was found guilty by a Dubai court in 2015 of embezzling nearly £4m from GFH Capital, a Middle East private equity firm that had owned Leeds United, a charge he has always denied.

The Briton spent nearly two years in jail in Dubai both before and after the conviction, where he said he was raped and repeatedly tortured and abused, claims accepted as truthful by a Scottish court in 2017. Last year, Haigh was ordered to repay the money in an English court, but he was declared bankrupt last August, although it is due to be discharged this week.

It has not yet been possible to determine who ordered the Pegasus intrusion of Haigh’s phone from the Amnesty analysis. At this time, any country attribution can only be tentatively based on an examination of the timing and circumstances.

Amnesty’s analysis of Haigh’s phone concluded there was evidence of a Pegasus-related infection on 3 August via Apple’s iMessage – and that there had been “the execution of a Pegasus process” – that is, Pegasus-related activity – on 3 and 4 August 2020. It is not clear what impact this had in this case, however.

A fortnight earlier, on 21 July, Haigh and other members of the campaign had lost contact with Latifa. They assumed that meant her phone and covert communications with them had been discovered by the Dubai authorities and were discussing what to do next.

“The hacking of my phone happened 10 days after we lost contact with Princess Latifa after having had communication with her for over a year and a half via a smartphone we managed to smuggle into the Dubai jail where she was being held against her will,” Haigh said. “In addition, it came at the exact time I was due to meet representatives of a supportive royal family member of Latifa in London.”

Latifa had tried and failed to flee her home city by yacht in March 2018, a dramatic escape that ended with the boat she was on being stormed by Indian commandos off the coast of Goa, a raid ordered at the request of Dubai's ruler.

For months it was unclear what had happened to the princess, until she began smuggling out videos to say she was being held in a “villa jail”. Since May, she has begun to enjoy a degree of freedom, with Instagram pictures showing her with friends at a Dubai shopping mall and at a Madrid airport terminal.

Three sources familiar with NSO’s operations said within the past year the company had stripped Dubai of its Pegasus licence. They said the decision had been informed primarily by human rights concerns, but did not dispute that using the software against Sheikh Mohammed’s own family members had also been a factor.

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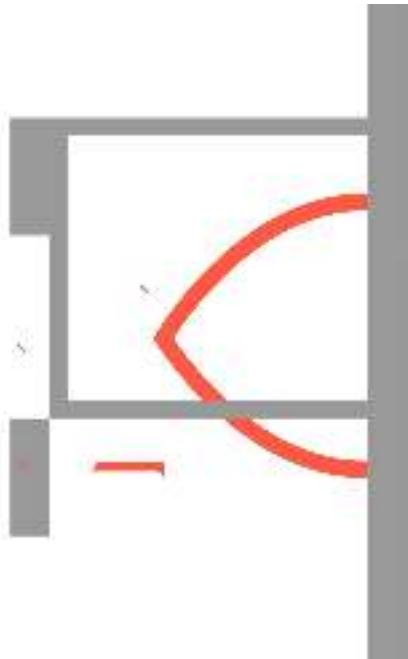
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The Pegasus project
Surveillance

Pegasus spyware found on journalists' phones, French intelligence confirms

Announcement is first time an independent and official authority has corroborated Pegasus project findings



Authorities inspected NSO's offices in Israel last week. Photograph: Jack Guez/AFP/Getty Images

Authorities inspected NSO's offices in Israel last week. Photograph: Jack Guez/AFP/Getty Images

[Kim Willsher](#) in Paris

Mon 2 Aug 2021 10.16 EDT

French intelligence investigators have confirmed that Pegasus spyware has been found on the phones of three journalists, including a senior member of staff at the country's international television station [France](#) 24.

It is the first time an independent and official authority has corroborated the findings of an international investigation by [the Pegasus project](#) – a consortium of 17 media outlets, including the Guardian. Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based nonprofit media organisation, and Amnesty International initially had access to a leaked list of 50,000 numbers that, it is believed, have been identified as those of people of interest by clients of Israeli firm NSO Group since 2016, and shared access with their media partners.

France's national agency for information systems security (Anssi) identified digital traces of NSO Group's hacking spyware on the television journalist's phone and relayed its findings to the Paris public prosecutor's office, which is overseeing the investigation into possible hacking.

Anssi also found Pegasus on telephones belonging to Lénaïg Bredoux, an investigative journalist at the French investigative website Mediapart, and the site's director, Edwy Plenel.

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The consortium believes the data indicates the potential targets NSO's government clients identified in advance of possible surveillance. While the data is an indication of intent, the presence of a number in the data does not reveal whether there was an attempt to infect the phone with spyware such as Pegasus, the company's signature surveillance tool, or whether any attempt succeeded. The presence in the data of a very small number of landlines and US numbers, which NSO says are "technically impossible" to access with its tools, reveals some targets were selected by NSO clients even though they could not be infected with Pegasus. However, forensic examinations of a small sample of mobile phones with numbers on the list found tight correlations between the time and date of a number in the data and the start of Pegasus activity – in some cases as little as a few seconds.

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Forbidden Stories believes at least 180 journalists worldwide may have been selected as people of interest in advance of possible surveillance by government clients of NSO.

A source at France 24 said the broadcaster had been “extremely shocked” to discover one of its staff had potentially been monitored.

“We are stupefied and angry that journalists could be the object of spying. We will not be taking this lying down. There will be legal action,” the source said.

Le Monde reported that the France 24 journalist, based in Paris, had been selected for “eventually putting under surveillance”. Police experts discovered the spyware had been used to target the journalist’s phone three times: in May 2019, September 2020 and January 2021, the paper said.

Bredoux told the Guardian that investigators had found traces of Pegasus spyware on both her and Plenel's mobile phones. She said the confirmation of long-held suspicions that they had been targeted contradicted the repeated denials of those who were believed to be behind the attempt to spy on them.

"It puts an end to the idea that this is all lies and fake news. It's the proof we need," Bredoux said.

French politicians expressed shock after the mobile numbers of the president, Emmanuel Macron, former prime minister Édouard Philippe and 14 serving ministers, including those for justice and foreign affairs, appeared in the leaked data. Research by the Pegasus project suggests that Morocco was the country that may have been interested in Macron and his senior team, raising fears that their phones were selected by one of France's close diplomatic allies.

NSO said Macron was not and never had been a "target" of any of its customers, meaning the company denies he was selected for surveillance or was surveilled using Pegasus. The company added that the fact that a number appeared on the list was in no way indicative of whether that number was selected for surveillance using Pegasus.

Morocco has "categorically" rejected and condemned what it called "unfounded and false allegations" that it had used Pegasus to spy on high-profile international figures. Lawyers for the government said last week that it had filed defamation claims in Paris against Amnesty International and Forbidden Stories.

Bredoux added: "It takes a bit of time to realise it, but it's extremely unpleasant to think that one is being spied on, that photos of your husband and children, your friends – who are all collateral victims – are being looked at; that there is no space in which you can escape. It's very disturbing."

But Bredoux, who in 2015 wrote a series of articles on Abdellatif Hammouchi, the director general of Moroccan internal intelligence, said her main concern was for the journalists' contacts.

“As journalists, what is even more worrying is that sources and contacts may have been compromised, that these are violations not just of your privacy and private life, but of the freedom of the press.

“We are not in the same situation as the journalists in Morocco but are being used like Trojan horses to get at them, so my thoughts are with our colleagues in Morocco.

“That my telephone could be used to help attack these journalists who fight every day makes me very angry.”

Last month when news of the [Pegasus project broke](#), [Macron](#) ordered [multiple investigations](#). The French prime minister, Jean Castex, said the Élysée had “ordered a series of investigations”, after vowing to “shed all light on the revelations”.

In Israel last week, [authorities inspected NSO’s offices](#). And on Sunday, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz [reported an “emergency” conference had been called](#) for cyber-firms to assess the impact of the revelations on the domestic sector. It is not clear which companies will attend the meeting.

[Pegasus](#) is the hacking software – or spyware – that is developed, marketed and licensed to governments around the world by NSO Group. The malware has the capability to infect billions of phones running either iOS or Android operating systems. It enables operators of the spyware to extract messages, photos and emails, record calls and secretly activate microphones.

The appearance of a number on the leaked list does not mean it was subject to an attempted or successful hack.

[Response from NSO and governments](#)

[Read more](#)

Human rights activists, journalists and lawyers around the world have been selected as possible candidates for potential invasive surveillance by authoritarian governments using the hacking software, according to the investigation into the massive data leak.

The investigation suggests widespread and continuing abuse of Pegasus, which [NSO insists](#) is only intended for use against criminals and terrorists.

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Afghan president blames ‘hasty’ US troop withdrawal for worsening violence

Ashraf Ghani comments come as government forces battle to prevent Lashkar Gah falling to the Taliban



A deserted market in Lashkar Gah on Monday. Photograph: Watan Yar/EPA
A deserted market in Lashkar Gah on Monday. Photograph: Watan Yar/EPA

Staff and agencies in Kabul
Mon 2 Aug 2021 14.33 EDT

Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, has blamed the speedy withdrawal of US-led troops for the worsening violence in his country, as government forces battled to prevent provincial cities from falling to the Taliban in a [major escalation](#) in fighting.

Taliban fighters assaulted at least three provincial capitals overnight – Lashkar Gah, Kandahar [and Herat](#) – after a weekend of heavy fighting that resulted in thousands of civilians fleeing the advancing militants.

On Monday, Ghani told parliament that “an imported, hasty” peace process “not only failed to bring peace but created doubt and ambiguity” among Afghans.

In an apparent recognition of the scale of the [Taliban](#) advance, Ghani said that his administration would now focus on protecting provincial capitals and major urban areas in the face of a rapid Taliban advance.

“The Taliban do not believe in lasting or just peace,” he said.

[Resurgent Taliban escalates nationwide offensive in Afghanistan](#)

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Fighting raged in Lashkar Gah, Helmand's provincial capital, where the Taliban launched coordinated attacks on the city centre and its prison after the government announced the deployment of hundreds of commandos to the area.

Hours after the president's remarks, Taliban fighters seized control of the provincial government's radio and TV building, replacing normal broadcasts with religious songs. The building sits just 400 metres to the north of the provincial governor's office, which was still under the control of the government, along with a few other government installations.

Fighting has intensified since early May, with the insurgents capitalising on the final stages of the withdrawal of US-led foreign forces after almost 20 years.

One resident, Hawa Malalai, warned of a growing crisis in the city. “There is fighting, power cuts, sick people in hospital, the telecommunication networks are down. There are no medicines and pharmacies are closed.”

For years, Helmand was the centrepiece of the US and British military campaign in [Afghanistan](#), only for it to slip deeper into instability.

The province was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting between foreign forces and the Taliban over the years when tens of thousands of troops poured in for the former US president Barack Obama’s surge.

The vast poppy fields in the provinces provide the lion’s share of the [opium for the international heroin trade](#), making it a lucrative source of tax and cash for the Taliban’s war chest.

The loss of Helmand’s capital would be a massive strategic and psychological blow for the government, which pledged to defend provincial capitals at all costs after losing much of the rural countryside to the Taliban over the summer.

Fighting also raged in some districts of Kandahar, the former bastion of the insurgents, and on the outskirts of the provincial capital.

Kandahar airport came under attack overnight on Sunday, with the Taliban firing rockets that damaged the runway, leading to the suspension of flights for several hours. The facility is vital to maintaining the logistics and air support needed to keep the Taliban from overrunning the city, while also providing aerial cover for large tracts of southern Afghanistan including nearby Lashkar Gah.

In the west, hundreds of commandos were also defending Herat after days of fierce fighting.

“The threat is high in these three provinces … but we are determined to repel their attacks,” the Afghan security forces spokesperson Ajmal Omar Shinwari told reporters on Sunday, adding it was an “emergency situation”.

The capture of any major urban centre by the Taliban would take its current offensive to another level and fuel concerns that the army is incapable of

holding out.

“If Afghan cities fall … the US [decision to withdraw from Afghanistan](#) will be remembered as one of the most notable strategic blunders in American foreign policy,” the Australia-based Afghanistan expert Nishank Motwani told AFP.

It would show that Washington “abandoned the most pro-American government in the region to radical Islamists that believe in turning to rubble all that has been built over the past two decades”.

[US says it will take in more Afghans who face danger from Taliban](#)

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Kabul has repeatedly dismissed the militants’ steady gains over the summer as lacking strategic value, but has largely failed to reverse their momentum.

The Taliban have seized Afghan cities in the past but have retained them only briefly.

On Monday, the Biden administration announced that because of increased Taliban violence, [it was expanding the eligibility of refugee admissions for Afghans with US links](#).

The state department said that the expanded eligibility would include Afghans who worked with US-based media organisations or non-governmental organisations or on projects backed by US funding.

But the US does not intend to help them leave the country, nor support them during the 12-14-month adjudication process.

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US ready to take in more Afghan refugees – but won't help them leave

State department expands eligibility for US-linked Afghans at risk of Taliban violence but announcement comes with notable caveats



Afghanistan security officials outside Jalalabad. The US ready to take in thousands more Afghans whose US links put them at risk from the Taliban as western troops leave. Photograph: Ghulamullah Habibi/EPA

Afghanistan security officials outside Jalalabad. The US ready to take in thousands more Afghans whose US links put them at risk from the Taliban as western troops leave. Photograph: Ghulamullah Habibi/EPA

Agence France-Presse in Washington

Mon 2 Aug 2021 12.21 EDT

The United States has said it is ready to take in thousands more Afghans whose US links put them at risk from the Taliban as western troops leave, but the asylum-seekers will face an arduous journey to safety.

Less than a month before the United States is set to end its longest-ever war – and [amid a surge in Taliban advances across Afghanistan](#) – the state department expanded the eligibility of refugee admissions beyond the roughly 20,000 Afghans who have applied under a program for interpreters who assisted US forces and diplomats.

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But the announcement came with a significant caveat: the US does not intend to help them leave the country, nor support them during the 12-14 month adjudication process.

“In light of increased levels of Taliban violence, the US government is working to provide certain Afghans, including those who worked with the United States, the opportunity for refugee resettlement to the United States,” the state department said in a statement.

“This designation expands the opportunity to permanently resettle in the United States to many thousands of Afghans and their immediate family members who may be at risk due to their US affiliation,” it said.

The state department said that the expanded eligibility will include Afghans who worked with US-based media organizations or non-governmental organizations or on projects backed by US funding.

The state department will also let in more Afghans who served as interpreters or in other support roles to forces of the US-led coalition but did not meet earlier requirements on time served.

A first group of more than 200 interpreters were flown into the United States on Friday as part of what has been dubbed Operation Allied Refuge amid gains on the ground by the Taliban.

Unlike with the interpreters, the United States said it had no immediate plans to fly out the newly eligible Afghans.

Instead, they will need to find their own way out of [Afghanistan](#) and support themselves during the lengthy process.

“However, we continue to review the situation on the ground, and we continue to examine all options to protect those who served with or for us,” a US official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

The applicants cannot seek directly to come to the United States but need to have referrals by their current or former employers. Once they make it outside Afghanistan, processing will take one year to 14 months, the official said.

Another US official said that Washington, while not helping the new applicants escape, has asked other countries including Pakistan to keep their borders open to them.

But Pakistan was the historic backer of the Taliban and has also seen violence against Afghans, especially from the Hazara Shiite minority. Just Monday, the United States and Britain jointly accused the Taliban of massacring civilians in a town they recently captured on the Pakistani border.

The other major recipient of Afghan refugees is Iran, which has no diplomatic relations with the United States. The second US official said that potential applicants had already moved on from Iran to Turkey, already the temporary home to millions of refugees from Syria.

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