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2021.05.13 - 2021.05.16

- [2021.05.16 - Opinion](#)
- [Headlines saturday 15 may 2021](#)
- [2021.05.15 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.15 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.15 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.15 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines friday 14 may 2021](#)
- [2021.05.14 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.14 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.14 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.14 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines thursday 13 may 2021](#)
- [2021.05.13 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.13 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.13 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.13 - Around the world](#)

2021.05.16 - Opinion

- [Less of the backstory, Angela Rayner, it's beginning to wear a bit thin](#)
- [The Observer view on the Israel-Palestine conflict](#)
- [The Observer view on the spread of the Indian variant in the UK](#)
- [Covid puts Boris Johnson in check – cartoon](#)
- [There's a time and a place for trees – don't transplant them for our amusement](#)
- [Lovely eulogies to Fleet Street's John Kay, but they overlook one important fact](#)
- [Do people believe Covid myths?](#)
- [Dua Lipa reminds fans of the thrills of live music](#)
- [Letters: one good reason not to have babies](#)
- [For the record](#)
- [Manchester City play beautiful football but it masks the ugliness of their owners](#)

[Opinion](#) **Angela Rayner**

Less of the backstory, Angela Rayner, it's beginning to wear a bit thin

[Barbara Ellen](#)



The deputy party leader may be riding high but she risks putting off working-class voters if she keeps ramming home her roots



Labour's Sir Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner during a visit to the Construction Skills Centre in London on 12 May.

Photograph: Stefan Rousseu/PA

Labour's Sir Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner during a visit to the Construction Skills Centre in London on 12 May.

Photograph: Stefan Rousseu/PA

Sat 15 May 2021 12.00 EDT

Is Labour's deputy leader, Angela Rayner, resting on her working-class laurels rather too much? She [emerged triumphant](#) from the recent byelection/reshuffle not only having avoided being demoted by Keir Starmer, but gaining more positions and power, with some claiming that she could win a leadership contest. Really? I've found Rayner's behaviour snaky; if she'd thrown Starmer under the bus any harder, he'd be scrubbing tyre marks off the front of his shirt. It's also said she's been briefing against him. Still, that's politics. Why shouldn't she be ambitious, even ruthless? But there's another big problem with Rayner: the relentless pushing of her backstory.

She is hardly alone in this: I'm no slouch when it comes to flashing my own working-class origins and impeccable council-house credentials. And Rayner's story is powerful: she left school at 16, pregnant, without

qualifications, becoming a social care worker and union rep, before entering politics. Impressive. Working-class visibility in Westminster is important; the insights gained from experience are hugely valuable.

Still, Rayner [doesn't half bang on about it](#) or let others do it for her. If you believe the hype, she's everything from streetwise Boudicca to factional Labour's all-healing queen to a veritable red-wall whisperer. It has reached the point where I wonder whether people, by whom I mean overawed, middle-class politicians, have been cowed into unquestioningly gulping down Rayner's self-mythology or whether she herself feels that her righteous background makes her untouchable.

That could be a dangerously overplayed hand: a working-class background doesn't set Rayner apart (Starmer is also of humble stock). It doesn't (or shouldn't) give her a magic pass within the Labour party. Most importantly, it doesn't mystically endow a politician with [vision, ability or a hotline to working people](#). Rayner is so deep into her "Angie from the block" shtick that she has forgotten that the only people who are reliably underwhelmed by a "working class" origin story are... working-class people! It's highly patronising to presume that this is all it takes to get their attention or their vote. Working-class people are like everybody else – they want credible, workable policies that benefit them. Stuff your backstory. The only people who lap that up are the middle classes or soppy former council-house brats like me.

Rayner prides herself on being a straight talker, so she'll appreciate me speaking frankly. Whatever the short-term gains, and despite the whooping of her fan club, recent events outed her as untrustworthy and slippery, someone caught red-handed playing both sides who managed to bluster her way out of it. Likewise, if a chippy sort like me has wearied of her posturing, so, presumably, have others. Class credibility is always valid, but as a starting point. Sooner or later, the question will always be: what else have you got?

Harry, that's enough of your self-pitying gibberish



Prince Harry: ‘Is he ever going to find work where His Royal Suffering isn’t the post-royal moneyspinner?’

Photograph: Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP

Oh, that it has come to this. As someone who felt genuine sympathy for Meghan and Harry – and I still do, in some ways – it becomes increasingly difficult to defend them as they sink ever deeper into the bubbling Californian quagmire of therapy-speak.

Harry’s latest podcast outburst, talking to actor Dax Shepherd, was a toe-curler. Apparently, Meghan got him into therapy. Gosh, really – not Princess Anne then? He’s broken the cycle of “genetic pain and suffering”. Eh? He says “there is no blame”, but then says that his parents and grandparents suffered first and then dumped it all on him.

Hmm... when Harry, who was on the podcast to flog his Apple TV+ mental health series, says “genetic”, does he mean behaviour/conditioning? Also, now that he feels so wonderfully “free”, is he ever going to find work where His Royal Suffering isn’t the post-royal moneyspinner?

People with mental health issues shouldn’t be criticised or lampooned. However, isn’t this new-age gibberish (“genetic pain”) an insult to people who undergo therapy and to therapy itself? Time was when there was a

distinct line between those who censured the Sussexes and those, like me, who felt that they had been given a raw deal. With every wallowing, near-unintelligible utterance, that line is blurring.

Making mums giving birth wear a mask is a cruelty too far



Childbirth as it should be, with not a mask in sight. Photograph: RubberBall Productions/Getty Images

The reports about women being forced to wear masks while giving birth are horrifying. The charity, Pregnant Then Screwed, which supports those who suffer pregnancy or maternity discrimination, surveyed 936 women who underwent childbirth in December and found that one in five was made to wear a mask. This happened despite joint official health guidance from the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in July that women undergoing childbirth should be exempt.

You don't have to have experienced giving birth to feel shocked at the inhumanity of this, but perhaps it helps. Women made to wear masks suffered breathlessness, claustrophobia, feelings of suffocation, asthma and panic attacks. One woman vomited into her mask; another felt she was dying. Which is all too easy to imagine. Childbirth involves a lot of

breathing and not just in terms of natural labour. Mothers need to keep themselves centred and calm and readily available oxygen is crucial for that. Moreover, childbirth is hard work, women get hot and sweat and this can go on for some time. How does a mask work with that?

There's a pandemic and NHS workers should be as safe as possible. Along the way, there may have been confusion as to what the mask protocol was at any given time. However, nearly a year after it was given, official guidance on masks in maternity wards must have been widely known. What happened in these instances – why were women in labour treated so brutally? When one woman became distressed and ripped off her mask, she was ordered to put it back on. While everyone else in these wards needs to be masked, mothers deserve to be excused.

Barbara Ellen is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/15/less-of-your-backstory-angela-rayner-show-us-your-political-credibility>.

[OpinionIsrael](#)

The Observer view on the Israel-Palestine conflict

[Observer editorial](#)

It's time for the international community to address this crisis with greater honesty about the key players and solutions



A Palestinian firefighter speaks to colleagues following an Israeli strike on Rafah town in the southern Gaza Strip, on 15 May. Photograph: Said Khatib/AFP/Getty Images

A Palestinian firefighter speaks to colleagues following an Israeli strike on Rafah town in the southern Gaza Strip, on 15 May. Photograph: Said Khatib/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 16 May 2021 01.30 EDT

The sudden rekindling of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the [ensuing horrors](#), is a shameful reminder of the international community's almost

criminal neglect of the crisis. There have been no substantive peace talks for more than a decade. Donald Trump's "[deal of the century](#)" was a cruel sham. Efforts now under way to engineer a ceasefire, or what is called a "sustainable calm", amount to applying a sticking plaster to a deeply felt, long-festering wound.

This story of neglect, cementing in place injustices and inequities stretching back to the 1948 Palestine war, made a new explosion of violence all but inevitable. It has played into the hands of [extremists on both sides](#) who seek victories, not peace. It threatens the future of Israel and Palestine and regional stability. The events of the past week have rendered the prospect of a lasting settlement more distant than ever.

In several respects, the latest clashes broke new ground, all of it negative. The sustained rocket barrage mounted by Hamas from its Gaza stronghold, targeting Tel Aviv and penetrating deep into the country, has surprised and alarmed Israel's leaders. So, too, has intercommunal violence pitting Arab and Jewish Israelis against each other in numerous towns and cities. This fracturing is potentially deeply damaging in the longer term.

But other aspects of the crisis are sickeningly familiar. As in previous wars between Israel and [Hamas](#), in 2009, 2012, and 2014, the principal casualties are civilians, including many children. Given Israel's vastly superior resources, the toll of death and destruction is disproportionately felt by Palestinians. As in the past, the violence is exacerbating political divisions and polarisation. It feeds the extremists' narratives of hate.

This state of affairs is inhuman, intolerable, irrational and wholly unacceptable. This cycle of mutual terror and suffering must not be allowed to repeat itself at some future date. Jews and Arabs living side by side can and should do better. Yet for this to happen, greater honesty is essential. It is no good pretending, as so many in Israel, the US, Europe and the Arab sphere do, that the "Palestinian problem" will somehow go away by itself. It will not.

So let's be honest. Benjamin Netanyahu is not fit to be Israel's prime minister. His de facto rejection of the UN-backed two-state solution, his support for seizures or annexation of Palestinian land in the West Bank and

East Jerusalem, his discriminatory attitude to Israeli Arabs, his tolerance of neo-fascist religious and far-right settler groups and the recent police outrage at Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque have [all stoked the current crisis](#).

Let's be honest. [Mahmoud Abbas](#), a discredited figure who presides over the Palestinian Authority, is not a fit leader for Palestine, especially without new elections. But neither is Hamas, an oppressive, aggressive organisation that depends on Qatar and Iran, rejects Israel's right to exist and evidently has no qualms about using its own people as human shields to advance its claim to Palestine's leadership.

Let's be honest. In the end, issues of religion, ethnicity, race and even land are not the main problem. The problem is that, politically speaking, both Israelis and Palestinians are shockingly badly led. Each day, shared hopes of peace, security and prosperity are betrayed by blinkered politicians and ideologues who prioritise their own interests and prejudices. Each day, by their actions and inactions, the US and Britain perpetuate a historical confrontation they played a big part in creating.

Both sides need fresh leaders, infused with a vision for peace, not war. A truce is a necessary first step and is required immediately. But a cessation must not be a signal, as in the past, for the world's attention to turn away. It must be the moment when a new, determined international diplomatic drive begins for a permanent two-state settlement that both peoples, under new management, can live with. It's the only honest way.

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[Opinion](#)**Coronavirus**

The Observer view on the spread of the Indian variant in the UK

[Observer editorial](#)

The government's slow response to ban travel to and from India has put the UK at risk



People queue at a temporary Covid-19 vaccination centre in Bolton, north-west England. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty

People queue at a temporary Covid-19 vaccination centre in Bolton, north-west England. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty

Sun 16 May 2021 01.00 EDT

‘Data, not dates.’ This was the approach [Boris Johnson](#) promised to take when he announced the roadmap out of lockdown for England in February. So far, the data has allowed the prime minister to meet the target dates for each phase of relaxing of social restrictions. Infection rates are the lowest

they have been since last August; the number of people in hospital with Covid has dropped dramatically and vaccination is proceeding apace.

Yet as we stand on the cusp of the next easing of social restrictions, happening across England, Wales and most of Scotland tomorrow, there are worrying signs that the [B.1.617.2 variant](#) first detected in India is spreading quickly in some parts of the country. In Bolton, infection rates are [10 times higher](#) than the English average. They may not yet justify a nationwide slowing in easing restrictions but they are worrying and require a rapid localised response to contain outbreaks. This mixed picture is a bitter pill to swallow. For weeks, the national mood has justifiably been one of relief; psychologically, it has felt like the end is in sight. The majority of British adults have now had one jab, offering them a good level of protection against Covid. Yet it was always clear that the biggest risk of a serious third wave would be from the spread of a variant that is more transmissible, more likely to cause serious illness or with a greater degree of vaccine resistance. Scientists are now confident that B.1.617.2 is at least as transmissible as the B.1.1.7 variant originally detected in Kent, which contributed to the terrible death rates we saw in the second wave, and quite possibly more so. If this is the case, the race between the virus and the vaccine rollout will become more loaded in the former's favour: modelling suggests that hospital admissions could [increase significantly](#) beyond what was seen in the second wave if B.1.617.2 proves to be much more transmissible.

There are serious questions to be asked about why the government did not put India, where B.1.617.2 has been spreading rapidly, on the red list for international travel sooner. It was not an easy choice: the UK has close links with India and many British citizens have extended family who live in the country. But Covid cases had been rising quickly there throughout March. In early April, Bangladesh and Pakistan were added to the red list even though infection rates were far lower than in India; the government did not add India to the list until [three weeks later](#). Ministers said this was because there were variants of concern circulating in Bangladesh and Pakistan, but B.1.617.2 had not yet been classified as a variant of concern. At the time, it seemed like folly not to take a more precautionary approach given India was in the midst of the worst global outbreak.

[We are responding calmly to Indian Covid variant, insists UK health minister](#)

[Read more](#)

The lack of transparency about how these decisions were taken has paved the way for speculation that India may have been kept off the red list for political reasons: Johnson had a strategically important trip to talk about a post-Brexit trade deal for late April that he wanted to go ahead. The number of people carrying B.1.617.2 into the UK during those three weeks [grew](#); the UK now has the [biggest outbreak](#) of B.1.617+ variants outside of India.

This is just the latest example of a government that has put off taking difficult actions until it is too late in this pandemic. Its decisions about when to impose and relax social restrictions have contributed to the UK's terrible death toll. While it has learned the lessons this time by taking a more gradual approach to relaxing restrictions, it should have acted with more caution on international travel.

Now that B.1.617.2 is spreading in some parts of the UK, urgent and precautionary action is required to contain it. Given the higher-than-average levels of deprivation in the parts of the country where it has taken root, it is even more important that the government funds proper sick pay for people who are self-isolating. This is precisely the wrong moment for outsourcers [Serco and Sitel](#) to be replacing clinical call handlers with non-clinical staff in the track-and-trace scheme. There are also difficult judgments to make about the vaccine rollout: local leaders in Blackburn are keen to offer vaccines to all over-18s, but protection takes three weeks to kick in and by then the variant may have spread to neighbouring areas where more vulnerable groups may not have been vaccinated because supply has been diverted. But given reports that people being admitted to hospital in Bolton with B.1.617.2 are predominantly those eligible for vaccination, but who have not yet had it, it is critical that everything possible is done to increase vaccination rates locally.

It is also no longer clear that the national approach to easing restrictions in England is the right one. Relaxing restrictions in Bolton tomorrow will undoubtedly make it more difficult to contain the variant's spread. In Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon has delayed relaxation in Moray and Glasgow,

where infection rates are relatively high but significantly lower than in Bolton. Local lockdowns inevitably bring costs, but may be justified in the long run in order to prevent a more widespread third wave of hospital admissions and deaths.

The story of the government's response to this pandemic is of a prime minister loth to take difficult and timely decisions. The country has paid the price in terms of higher death rates and even tougher restrictions imposed for longer later down the line. If B.1.617.2 proves not much more transmissible than the Kent variant, there may be no reason yet to change course. But the government must halt or reverse its roadmap if there are signs it has not been contained. That would be the price of its failure to act sooner to prevent the variant being brought into the UK in the first place.

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[Observer comment cartoon](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Covid puts Boris Johnson in check – cartoon

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NotebookTrees and forests

There's a time and a place for trees – don't transplant them for our amusement

Rowan Moore



Making an exhibition out of living things rather defeats any environmental message they are supposed to convey



Artists Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey with their 100 oak saplings outside the Tate Modern. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Artists Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey with their 100 oak saplings outside the Tate Modern. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Sun 16 May 2021 02.00 EDT

A gaggle of oak saplings has gathered outside Tate Modern. They were grown by the British artists Ackroyd & Harvey from acorns from the trees that the German artist Joseph Beuys had planted in the city of Kassel in the 1980s, in a “[social sculpture](#)” called *7000 Oaks*. This temporary installation, the official blurb says, creates “a place for gathering and for rethinking our connections with nature”.

It takes its place alongside the forthcoming four-week appearance of [400 trees](#) in the courtyard of Somerset House, by the designer Es Devlin for the London Design Biennale, which is also meant to make us reflect on nature and the environment. Plus, there’s a [temporary wooded hill](#) planned for Marble Arch and the different-but-related craze for putting trees high up on multistorey apartment buildings in [Shanghai](#), [Milan](#) and [Quito](#).

What these projects have in common is a wish to put trees where they don’t really want to be, whether high in the sky or in temporary installations.

Many look engaging, but the resources required to move, lift, contain and irrigate the trees, notwithstanding Devlin's and Ackroyd & Harvey's pledges to minimise their projects' impacts, must surely work against whatever [environmental messages](#) their designers might want to send. I love a good tree, but in the ground, where its roots can spread, where it doesn't look as if it's waiting for an arboreal Uber to take it somewhere else.

Loathe it or list it?



City Hall: always a strange building Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

Few things make an architecture critic feel older than the news that a building whose inception you witnessed is being proposed for listing as a building of architectural and historic interest. This is the case with Foster and Partners' 19-year-old [City Hall](#) in London, to be vacated by the mayor's office and the Greater London Authority in favour of cheaper premises in the former docklands, which the Twentieth Century Society says is "at risk".

It was always a strange building, the result of an estate-agent-led process of procurement in which it was belatedly realised that the seat of London's democracy should somehow be more special than the bland office block first proposed for this site. So the idea of a spiral ramp was imported from the same architects' more successful renovation of the Berlin Reichstag, up

which the public were supposed to be able to stroll. Security concerns meant that it never worked as intended, while the building's curving shapes made for some awkward office spaces. So should it stay or should it go? Hard to say. Perhaps they should make it into a giant aquarium, like its predecessor, County Hall.

Time to tax boomers



A girl adds a heart to the National Covid Memorial Wall in London. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

Speaking of age, here's a proposal re Covid. The younger generations, as others have noted, have tended to make the biggest sacrifices during the lockdowns, in terms of lost employment, lost learning, disrupted social life and childcare nightmares, often endured in cramped conditions, in order to protect the health of those older people most at risk from the virus. Which adds to the other generational inequalities, such as the unearned and untaxed bounties of four decades of house price inflation, which are enjoyed by many of the old at the expense of the young's access to decent and affordable housing.

So, as a minimum, those oldies who can afford it should offer a post-lockdown thank you to the young, in the form of a gift administered by

competent authorities. Or, if too few see enough justice in this idea to do it voluntarily, a tax. A boomer tax, you could call it.

Rowan Moore is the Observer's architecture critic

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Opinion](#) **Domestic violence**

Lovely eulogies to Fleet Street's John Kay, but they overlook one important fact

[Catherine Bennett](#)



Why did so few think it necessary to point out that the Sun reporter killed his wife?



John Kay, former Sun chief reporter. Photograph: Carl Court/AFP/Getty Images

John Kay, former Sun chief reporter. Photograph: Carl Court/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 16 May 2021 02.30 EDT

Many non-*Sun* readers previously unfamiliar with the work of John Kay must now be, if not exactly regretting their subscription oversight, aware of countless triumphs missed.

This “brilliant *Sun* chief reporter famed for his scoops, exposés and effortless mastery of tabloid-speak” (as the *Daily Telegraph* titled its obituary) was someone, we have learned since his death on 7 May, above the common run of hacks, “an elegant, dapper ex-public schoolboy renowned for his kindness and generosity to rivals and reporters, whom he mentored and encouraged...”

The *Evening Standard*’s tribute was more in the spirit of *J’Accuse*: “[My mentor died a broken man](#) after Starmer’s groundless prosecution,” wrote Tom Newton Dunn, a presenter on *Times Radio*. Kay the “Fleet Street legend” was also, it emerged, a victim, being among the *Sun* martyrs [cleared in 2015](#) after a prosecution (for paying officials for stories) brought when Sir

Keir Starmer was director of public prosecutions. One of Kay's sources went to prison.

The *UK Press Gazette* [dwelt on Kay's peerless contributions](#) to the culture depicted in *Stick it up Your Punter! The Uncut Story of the Sun Newspaper*, James Graham's [Ink](#) and, less cheerfully, the Leveson inquiry. His proudest moment was when, in 1992, he broke the contents of the Queen's speech. To one former editor, Kelvin MacKenzie, he was "the greatest Fleet Street story-getter of all time". "In many ways, he was the *Sun* newsroom," said another colleague.

No telling detail was too small for the *Sun*'s own tribute. Kay always, the paper marvelled, "carried a neatly ironed handkerchief, which he used to dry the apple he washed with bottled water and ate every morning before phoning his father Ernest in Cambridge".

Well, almost no detail. Omitted, for instance, was Kay's notorious made-up "interview" with the widow of a Falklands hero, during MacKenzie's editorship. The Press Council called it a "deplorable, insensitive deception on the public".

In this more sensitive era, there are presumably good reasons why anyone new to Kay will have finished the prominent *Sun* and *Evening Standard* pieces unaware of the existence of Kay's first wife, Harue, whom he killed in 1977.

Without wishing to distort his story, the relevant editors must have considered it superfluous that, prior to being tragically victimised by Starmer, Kay was convicted of Harue's manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility. He was depressed, a court heard, due to professional anxieties. According to a contemporaneous *Guardian* report (["Torment of reporter who killed wife"](#)): "He, thinking it would be better to end it all, pushed her head under the water. Naturally she struggled, but by tightening the hold he held her down by the throat."

With the *Sun* paying for an eminent barrister and promising to take Kay back, the sentence was psychiatric treatment. Once restored, the greatest wife-drowning journalist of his generation did not shrink from exposing

imperfections in others. Peter Chippindale and Chris Horrie recorded the reaction of a TV producer whose privacy Kay invaded: “All he’d done was leave his wife, yet the story had been written by a man who had killed his.” That killing, they write in *Stick it up your Punter!*, “officially became a taboo subject”.

And so the subject has demonstrably remained, even amid greater awareness of women’s deaths from domestic violence and even in places not owned by Rupert Murdoch. Is this exemplary tact, some partner-killers must be wondering, something reserved for hapless senior journalists or can we expect to see, say, Oscar Pistorius routinely described as an Olympic legend who, before falling victim to his demons, was always kind to a fault? Similarly, in a spirit of fairness, their supporters await the posthumous rehabilitation of Louis Althusser (“Brilliant Paris philosopher famed for his effortless mastery of Marxist-speak”), of the only occasionally femicidal Phil Spector (“Died a broken man”), of the tormented but always exquisitely accessorised Lord Lucan (“Swashbuckling peer engulfed by personal catastrophe”).

As for women, tributes whose selectivity compounds the original obliteration of Harue Kay can’t but confirm the very provisional nature, in some powerful parts of the UK media, of respect for their sex. What’s one drowned and strangled 27-year-old woman when there are old men’s scoops to memorialise? Wasn’t it more important to hear about that time Kay discovered Princess Beatrice was going to be called Beatrice? There are terminally disgraced journalists who must wish, for their part, that they had only drowned and strangled someone weaker than themselves instead of doing something professionally unforgivable, such as plagiarism or persuading Diana to do an interview.

That both the *Sun* and the *Standard* only mentioned the manslaughter of Harue Kay in tardy, post-publication additions should not, of course, be taken to signal total indifference to male violence against women. After a more recent strangler, Anthony Williams, was [found guilty of manslaughter not murder of his wife, Ruth](#) – lockdown depression made him do it – he said he “snapped” after she told him to “get over it” – the *Sun* quoted David Challen, an impressive campaigner for justice in domestic abuse: “An appalling verdict.”

Like the *Standard*, it [covered the campaign](#) by We Can't Consent To This for legislation that will finally prohibit use of the “rough sex” defence by men who claim to have killed partners inadvertently.

It's in this semi-enlightened context – and one in which far greater writers of fiction than John Kay are understood to have been, at the same time, extreme misogynists – that indifference towards the killing is possibly more disturbing than in the 70s, when even the naming of domestic violence was a novelty. Now the Refuge website asks, of a domestic abuser's mental illness defence: “Why is it that he only abuses his partner – not his colleagues, strangers or friends?”

How many women did Kay need to kill before his current admirers thought it worth a mention or paused before writing, like ex-colleague Trevor Kavanagh: “He was the man every other journalist on the *Sun* wanted to emulate.” Or to put it more simply: Outrage: “killer-obsessed” *Sun* men spark concern.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[The weekly stats uncovered](#) **Coronavirus**

Do people believe Covid myths?

[David Spiegelhalter](#) and [Anthony Masters](#)

Misinformation could be causing real harm in the community



Lemon and chillies, believed to ward away evil, are hung outside a closed shop during restrictions to curb the spread of coronavirus in Jammu, India, on 12 May. Photograph: Channi Anand/AP

Lemon and chillies, believed to ward away evil, are hung outside a closed shop during restrictions to curb the spread of coronavirus in Jammu, India, on 12 May. Photograph: Channi Anand/AP

Sun 16 May 2021 03.00 EDT

Like viruses, false information spreads through networks. [In March 2020](#), more than a quarter of the top Covid-19 related videos on YouTube contained misleading claims and those had more than 60m views worldwide. The World Health Organization's Covid ["myth-busters" page](#) counters ideas

such as the notion that eating garlic protects you against infection. But how many people believe such claims?

[University of Cambridge researchers](#) found in an online survey that about 15% of UK respondents thought it was more reliable than not that “the coronavirus is part of a global effort to enforce mandatory vaccination”, while 9% supported “the new 5G network may be making us more susceptible to the virus”. They found the most important factor linked to resilience to misinformation was numeracy. While we are fully aware that correlation is not causation, it encourages the idea that greater “data literacy” in the population could help bring some critical awareness of the dubious claims circulating on social media. In the meantime, [research has shown](#) that an effective strategy is to vigorously “pre-bunk” misinformation – essentially inoculating people against fake news by getting in the warnings first.

Nevertheless, we should be cautious about accepting claims about what theories people believe. [Another survey](#) made [headlines](#) when it found that one in five people agreed with: “Jews have created the virus to collapse the economy for financial gain.” However, that survey used an imbalanced scale: there were four options to agree and only one way to disagree. [“Acquiescence bias”](#) means some people like to be agreeable and some just want to get through the survey quickly. A [subsequent survey](#) with a balanced response scale still found 11% support for this statement.

Falsehoods may have real adverse consequences. The Cambridge researchers found that a one-point increase on a seven-point scale of susceptibility to misinformation was correlated with a 23% (17%-28%) decrease in intention to get vaccinated and the recent surge of the Indian variant is linked to areas of low vaccine uptake. Trusted community leaders and healthcare workers have the vital task of countering claims that could be contributing to this threat.

David Spiegelhalter is chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge. Anthony Masters is statistical ambassador for the Royal Statistical Society

[Names in the news](#)[Dua Lipa](#)

Dua Lipa reminds fans of the thrills of live music

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



After months of lockdown, the postponed Brit awards offered an instant uplift



Dua Lipa: 'the performance was astonishing'. Photograph: Dave J Hogan/Getty

Dua Lipa: 'the performance was astonishing'. Photograph: Dave J Hogan/Getty

Sat 15 May 2021 10.00 EDT

Usually, I find the Brit awards to be as dry as a mouthful of oatcakes, but this year's [postponed ceremony](#) seemed fresher than in recent years, working within the disruptions caused by the pandemic to put on a more creative, exuberant evening. Following a couple of closely monitored trials, it was one of the first landmark music events to have welcomed back an audience, of 4,000 people, mostly key workers, all extremely up for it.

There was a split second when the excitement of a crowd simply being there gave me goosebumps. Some of the performances were videos broadcast into the O2 Arena – the Weeknd sang in a stormy box, while Coldplay appeared with holographic backing dancers on a pontoon on the Thames, just outside – and I thought reigning queen Dua Lipa might be performing via video, too. She started a medley of hits from this year's certified [best album](#), *Future Nostalgia*, with a prerecorded clip of her singing on the tube (I moved away from London almost a year ago, but I know its spirit will never leave me, because my first reaction was an instinctive irritation that it might delay the

service). As the doors opened, she burst on to the stage, into a skeleton of a tube carriage, in person, right there. The performance was astonishing and left no one in doubt as to why Dua Lipa has so dominated pop music over the past 18 months. It was the moment she first appeared, in her union jack skirt and jacket, that got me, because of the roar of the crowd. It was communal, thrilling and it made me pine to be watching live music again.

The tentative possibility of going to a local venue to see a show is moving closer, but the nerves of the live music industry are jangling and the government is doing little to soothe them. The Association of Independent Festivals has issued a [red alert](#), warning that 76% of festivals scheduled to take place in July and August this year– and that is just the festivals still hoping to go ahead, after many said they couldn't risk it – could be cancelled without urgent intervention.

They need a safety net of insurance, in case of unexpected Covid-related issues. But last week, the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, said that any government-backed [insurance scheme](#) would only be considered after 21 June, which is a bit like opening the bar after everyone has gone home. The British entertainment industry is lucrative, but once again, despite the vast number of jobs and huge income it generates, music is being ghosted.

Will Friends reunited work 20 years on?



The way they were: the cast of Friends. Photograph: HO/Reuters

Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck have been photographed together on what was reported to be a “romantic skiing holiday” (an oxymoron: I have never been skiing, but I doubt that anything involving an item of clothing called salopettes encourages sexual frisson), while one of the most awaited television events of recent years is a [new episode](#) of *Friends*. We just need to bring back jeans the width of a house and Body Shop Ananya lotion and it will be as if the last 20 years never happened.

A longing for more simple times may be why the *Friends* obsession has endured. Last week saw the release of a teaser clip for [The One Where They Get Back Together](#), a reunion special this month, with the actors appearing as themselves and featuring other actors who played characters on the show, also as themselves and, [oddly, Malala Yousafzai and David Beckham](#), set to a slowed-down, melancholy version of I’ll Be There For You, which makes it look a bit like the in memoriam segment at an awards ceremony. “Could we BE any more excited?!” asked Jennifer Aniston, posting the clip, to which the obvious response is, well, probably a bit more, yes.

No more talking the talk



Ellen DeGeneres: and it's goodnight from me... Photograph: Michael Rozman/AP

Ellen DeGeneres's talkshow will end after its 19th season, but emphatically not, she says, because of the BuzzFeed exposé about the production having a “toxic workplace culture”, tumbling ratings or that many celebrities seem about as keen to appear as they would be to make a sequel to [Gal Gadot and pals'](#) cover of *Imagine*.

“When you're a creative person, you constantly need to be challenged, and as great as this show is, and, as fun as it is, it's just not a challenge any more,” DeGeneres told [the Hollywood Reporter](#). At first, that sounds like “it's not you, it's me”, but it is also suspiciously close to “it's not me, it's you”.

DeGeneres's brand was built, famously, on her “be kind” slogan, which, as many have noted, seems at odds with her penchant for practical jokes that involve scaring the life out of people or the hidden camera tests to see if people could behave decently. In another [interview](#) last week, with the US breakfast show *Today*, DeGeneres refuted claims that the show had been a [toxic workplace](#) “when all I've ever heard from every guest that comes on the show is what a happy atmosphere this is”, although I can't imagine celebrity guests are in the same position as employees.

It is the end of an era. Her career path , from star and creator of a cancelled sitcom to queen of daytime television, was spectacular and she redefined what it meant to be a celebrity. But times have changed and the illusion of relatability is no longer enough to make it bankable.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Observer lettersPopulation

Letters: one good reason not to have babies

Many young couples do not want to bring children into a world devastated by the climate crisis



Children born today could face a tough future. Photograph: Oksana Kuzmina/Alamy Stock Photo

Children born today could face a tough future. Photograph: Oksana Kuzmina/Alamy Stock Photo

Sun 16 May 2021 01.00 EDT

While I agree with all the reasons Sonia Sodha gives for falling birth rates in some countries ([“The world needs babies. So we’d better rethink what we expect from mothers”](#), Comment), she misses one huge and increasing reason. Younger couples are making the conscious decision not to bring children into a world that they foresee may be devastated by the climate crisis unfolding around us.

Unless the world's leaders truly commit to massive and lasting changes to how we create and use energy, young people will understandably not wish to risk condemning the next generation to lives of potential hunger, escalating natural disasters and enforced population resettlement, with the bitter conflicts these will cause.

Jill Wallis

Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire

Sonia Sodha writes: "If we want more people to want more children..." Those of us who understand the connection between overpopulation and climate change see any fall in the western birth rate as a chink of hope. Reducing the number of consumers of the Earth's resources is only one step on the path to saving the human race, but without it there is no chance.

Carol Granere

Evie, Orkney

Keeping the ants at bay

I was saddened but not surprised to read Catherine Bennett's article about the second-homing of Cornwall ("[Rise up, Cornwall, against London's SUV drivers lusting for a second home](#)", Comment). It was beginning when I lived in Cornwall 35 years ago. Many villages were starting to suffer. Cottages were closed up for most of the year; owners came down for a few weeks in summer, usually bringing most of their own provisions, so not needing to use the village shop, many of which closed. Next to go was often the village school (fewer young families), the local bus service (not enough passengers) and other facilities essential to the beleaguered villagers.

It would be a reasonable idea to charge second-homers double or even triple council tax. It might deter them a bit and would at least ensure that their money was helping to fund local amenities. Obviously, the knowledge that the Cornish don't really want these "emmets" (ants), as they are known, has done little to deter them, but at least a forced contribution to the economy might help to offset the impact.

Karen Sadler

Bristol

The evils of ‘fire and rehire’

Many thanks for again highlighting the iniquitous practice of “fire and rehire” (“[Call to outlaw ‘dirty tactic’ of fire and rehire gets public backing](#)”, News). This is one of those tangible issues that Labour should surely have prioritised in an election campaign where, inexplicably, vast swaths of the electorate claimed not to know what Labour stood for.

Here in the West Midlands, we have the case of the Heartlands hospital porters, pushed by threats of “fire and rehire” and dismissal without the customary three months’ notice into new rotas, involving considerable disruption to their finances, mental health and family lives. This is one of the wealthiest trusts in the country, with no financial necessity to treat low-paid NHS workers in this way. Nor does patient care benefit, as porters who have gained experience in specific departments over many years find themselves having to adjust to unfamiliar tasks.

Martin Short

Atherstone, Warwickshire

Sadness at C of E revisionism

Dismay and sadness were just a couple of the emotions I felt when reading the account of the Church of England plan to review thousands of monuments in churches and cathedrals that contain historical references to slavery and colonialism (“[C of E reviews removal of colonial link monuments](#)”, News). Faced with dwindling numbers, soaring maintenance bills and an ageing church population, exactly who is going to have the time, energy and money to do this?

Looking back on history is complicated and sometimes it is good to remind ourselves how far we have come. If all evidence is obliterated, this may prove difficult for future generations to comprehend. The C of E shouldn’t worry too much about this review as in a few years’ time quite a few of the buildings will be closed and locked.

Pam Thornton

Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset

We need science and arts

Barbara Ellen spells out very well the hidden agenda of the government to bring about cuts to arts education ([“How creative of the Tories to invent a culture war to disguise arts cuts”](#), Comment). The insidious method of pitching arts against science as a means of cutting expenditure does not hold intellectual power and will not fool any academic. Both are essential to the identity and lifeblood of the nation, let alone the economic benefit the arts generate. This is not and has never been a culture war.

Dimitrios Tsouris

Exeter

Social democracy on the up

Although the last decade may not have been kind to some social democratic parties, there are signs of a recent change ([“It’s not just in Britain – across Europe, social democracy is losing its way”](#), Comment). The US president, Joe Biden, has adopted radical social policies on health and the environment, has spent public money on infrastructure and introduced progressive taxation policies. The article acknowledged that across Europe such policies are popular with the public, as shown by Welsh Labour’s latest election victory. Mark Drakeford’s excellent handling of the Covid crisis was helped by the NHS being in public hands and through a close working relationship with trade unions that made difficult decisions easier to implement in the workplace.

Wales was the first UK nation to provide free bus passes to the over-60s and abolished charges for prescriptions and hospital parking. The rail franchise is publicly owned and the water company is not for profit. As the country recovers from the pandemic and faces the unfolding economic and social disaster of Brexit, such socialist policies become more relevant. I hope the UK Labour party can look ahead by considering these policies and communicate them effectively to the public at the next election.

Bryan Davies

Cwmbran, Torfaen

And so to Jed

Further to Chandra Emmanuel's letter ("[Ted Hastings is right](#)"), I too noticed Hastings's timely comment in the final episode of *Line of Duty* – “What's happened to us? When did we stop caring about honesty and integrity?” – and wonder whether writer Jed Mercurio might wish to grant AC-12 a period of time out of the spotlight to recharge their batteries and, in the meantime, write a fantasy drama in which corruption within the government is investigated and leads to the prosecution of guilty parties. I imagine it would be every bit as much of a cliffhanger as *Line of Duty*.

Lisa Norfolk

Cranbrook, Kent

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[For the recordUK news](#)

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 16 May 2021 01.00 EDT

A UN report drew on a survey of, not interviews with, 901 journalists from 125 countries ([UN catalogues 'chilling tide of abuse' against female journalists](#), 2 May, page 27).

It was Anne Odeke who played the role of Mrs Ripper in the play *Tennis Elbow*, not Cherylee Houston, as we said in a [review](#) (Theatre & Classical, 9 May, New Review, page 25).

A book review referred to the house of the novelist Carson McCullers as being in Columbus, Ohio. It is in Columbus, Georgia ([Identity parade](#), 2 May, New Review, page 30).

Homophone corner: "He then had a dozen oysters and a draft Guinness, followed by some Sachertorte" ([Why Len Deighton is set to thrill a new generation](#), 2 May, page 42).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Scientists launch search for genetic test to spot killer prostate cancer](#)

[Ethiopian patriarch pleads for international help to stop rape and genocide by government troops](#)

[Barry Jenkins: 'Maybe America has never been great'](#)

[Celebrities unite to back #StopAsianHate campaign](#)

Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU, email observer.readers@observer.co.uk, tel 020 3353 4736

[Opinion](#)Manchester City

Manchester City play beautiful football but it masks the ugliness of their owners

[Nick Cohen](#)



Being backed by an oppressive regime takes the gloss off the Premier League champions



Manchester City fans celebrate at the Etihad Stadium, after the team were crowned Premier League champions following Manchester United's defeat by Leicester, on 11 May. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Manchester City fans celebrate at the Etihad Stadium, after the team were crowned Premier League champions following Manchester United's defeat by Leicester, on 11 May. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Sat 15 May 2021 13.00 EDT

You cannot tell the truth about beauty in England without the ugliest people in the country threatening you. The National Trust is the custodian of the beautiful best of the nation's heritage. Let it compile a [historical record](#) on how many of the stately homes of England were connected to the slave trade and Conservative MPs demand a Putinesque "panel of patriots" to [purge "elitist bourgeois liberals"](#) from cultural life.

Our Orwellian culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, feeds the beasts in his base as he delivers lectures on what versions of history we must remember. Meanwhile, the trustees of museums are told to [sign "loyalty pledges"](#) backing government policies. All because researchers challenge the prejudices of the ruling party by accurately describing British history.

Manchester City are the most beautiful football team in England – probably the world – and deservedly won another Premier League title last week. City have the best manager anyone can remember and from Ederson in goal to Phil Foden up front, players of sublime skill and enviable courage and self-control.

When football correspondents investigate how that [success is built on the money](#) directed to the club by the petro-princeling Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan, all hell breaks loose. Fans don't want to hear about the connection between the beauty of the play on the field and a deputy prime minister from the United Arab Emirates, which [bans political opponents, jails dissidents and enforces state-sponsored misogyny](#). They do not want to know that UAE wealth comes not only from oil, tourism and financial services, but from the labour system in the Gulf states that isn't quite slavery but too close to it for comfort. Foreign nationals account for 88% of the UAE's population. Those who leave their employers without permission face punishments for "absconding" and, in the [words of Human Rights Watch](#), are "acutely vulnerable to forced labour".

Sport and culture are becoming like gangsters' molls. You can admire the beauty but must stay away from the suffering behind the spectacle.

Try starting a [conversation](#) about how Manchester City could afford the biggest single-season wage bill in English football history (£351.4m in 2019-20) and an estimated €1.036bn (£890m) invested in transfer indemnities to sign the squad's current players and watch as the abuse descends.

One football writer pointed me to this season's Champions League semi-final between the UAE's Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain, owned by the rulers of Qatar. He said that one day historians would go through the television and press coverage and notice how few journalists discussed the fundamental fact that plutocratic and dictatorial states were using sport to burnish their image.

I can see why people want to avert their eyes. Are Manchester City fans meant to stop supporting their team when Gulf money turns it from an also-ran into a world-beater? The journalists who report on its finances do not say

that. They just do their job: presenting the truth that in England and France, regimes that combine avarice and oppression in equal measure control the best clubs. The National Trust's report on the links between its properties and slavery and colonialism was scholarly and dry. As with honest football reporters, the historians merely presented the evidence. Yet Conservatives reacted like the most fanatical City fans when their own beautiful myths were questioned.

You only have to see how rarely the empire appears in popular fiction to know that imperial nostalgia has not provoked the backlash. Instead of nostalgia, we have imperial amnesia: a desire to hide from the ugliness of the past. Accurate histories of empire puncture the Scottish sense of victimhood and the English belief in the quaintness and decency of our civilisation. According to the national myth, country homes were the backdrops for charming love affairs and eccentric dukes rather than monuments built on the broken backs of enslaved men and women.

Conservatives reacted like the most fanatical City fans when their own beautiful myths were questioned

A worldly observer might say slaves built the Parthenon and that tithes the medieval church extracted from a poverty-stricken peasantry paid for the Gothic cathedrals. Just as there is a crime behind every great fortune, so there is an unjust society behind every work of beauty. Better to accept that than become a bitter, puritanical nag who cannot see others enjoying the beauties of a country estate or of football played at the highest level without wanting to ruin their pleasure.

But we can afford to be worldly about the monuments of classical Athens and medieval Christendom because they are from lost civilisations. Britain's past and football's present matter because racism and the power of plutocracy are vital and vicious forces that surround us. The response to journalists and historians who report the facts is not therefore a shrug of the shoulders, but a consuming fury. Conservatives who decry woke censorship now sound like the most intolerant of leftists, as they demand purges and authorised histories.

Manchester City fans, meanwhile, have become a raging force on social media. As well as cheering on their team, they cheer on their team's owners and chant Mansour's name. In my home city, there are thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of people willing to engage in power worship at its most demeaning and to whitewash an autocratic state solely because it pays for exquisite football.

"I've had the most sustained toxic abuse I've ever seen in my life when I investigated City," one football reporter told me. Fans put the home addresses of journalists on the internet, while in one instance bricks were thrown through a reporter's window. The Football Writers' Association has contacted Manchester City three times about the abuse directed at its members. The club was concerned and courteous in its replies. However, it sounds like the Tory right, and every dictatorship whether in the Gulf or not, as it fuels fans' anger with conspiratorial talk of "organised and clear" [attempts](#) to damage the club's reputation and threats to hire "the 50 best lawyers in the world" to sue the football authorities if they dare challenge Manchester City's interests.

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," wrote John Keats. "That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." In Britain, however, when beautiful national myths and the beautiful game are questioned, truth is always the first casualty of the culture war.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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Headlines saturday 15 may 2021

- [Coronavirus India variant could seriously disrupt lifting of lockdown, says Boris Johnson](#)
- [Analysis India variant could lead to serious third wave in UK](#)
- [Indian variant Which countries have highest infection rates?](#)
- [Explained What England can do to combat the Indian variant](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

India variant could seriously disrupt lifting of lockdown, says Boris Johnson

PM announces acceleration of Covid vaccine programme, saying race could become a ‘great deal tighter’

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

02:00

Johnson: India Covid variant could jeopardise June reopening – video

[Aubrey Allegretti](#), [Nicola Davis](#), [Helen Pidd](#), [Josh Halliday](#) and [Libby Brooks](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 14.00 EDT

The final stage of the lifting of coronavirus lockdown restrictions across England could face “serious disruption” due to the India variant, the prime minister has warned, as he announced plans to accelerate the vaccine programme to curb its spread.

Boris Johnson said the gap between the first and second Covid jab would be cut from 12 weeks to eight for all over-50s and the clinically vulnerable, admitting: “The race between our vaccine programme and the virus may be about to become a great deal tighter.”

He announced that the army would be deployed to two variant hotspots – Bolton and Blackburn with Darwen – to help with vaccinations, and urged residents in those areas to “think twice” before taking advantages of the freedoms allowed again from Monday.

Johnson said plans to ease restrictions on 17 May – allowing people to meet in groups of six indoors – would go ahead, but that the variant “could make it more difficult” for the final stage of unlocking to proceed on 21 June.

He said the India variant appeared to be “more transmissible” than the dominant strain in the UK, which originated in Kent, but that it was not yet clear by how much. If it is significantly more, then, he warned, “we’re likely to face some hard choices”.

“I have to level with you that this new variant could pose a serious disruption to our progress and could make it more difficult to move to step four in June,” Johnson said.

Asked whether the lockdown easing would have to be paused during a press conference, he added: “The truth is, we cannot say for certain ... The situation is very different from last year, we are in the throes of an incredible vaccine rollout ... We just have to wait and see ... We rule nothing out.”

The PM’s words came as new documents released by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) revealed just how worried scientists are about the variant. Modelling by Sage suggested it was “a realistic possibility” that it could be up to 50% more transmissible than the Kent variant.

If that was the case, they said, progressing to stage 3 of the road map – due on Monday – would “lead to a substantial resurgence of hospitalisations (similar to, or larger than, previous peaks)”.

The variant’s spread will raise questions about perceived government delays in adding India to the “red list” of countries from which arrivals have to quarantine in hotels.

Johnson’s announcement came following calls from councils in Lancashire and Greater Manchester to let them roll out vaccines to all over-18s in some variant hotspots, including Bolton and Blackburn with Darwen.

Prof Chris Whitty, England’s chief medical officer, said the “majority view” of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) was

that this approach would be a “net disadvantage”.

However, councillor Andy Morgan, Bolton council’s cabinet member for adult social services, insisted the council had been given some “flexibility” to vaccinate younger people, and would be offering vaccines to all over-18s in the three worst-affected wards from Saturday.

“Our interpretation of the guidance is that we can start to vaccinate 18s and over in BL3 [the affected postcode] tomorrow, subject to vaccination supply,” he said.

“We’ve got some flexibility locally to surge-vaccinate, but the biggest thing for Bolton is not being locked down, which would have been devastating for the town. David Greenhalgh [Bolton’s council leader] has been lobbying every man and a dog all day on that, so we are relieved,” said Morgan.

Despite the councillor’s confidence, local politicians have no jurisdiction over vaccination centres. Bolton’s clinical commissioning group runs the district’s eight sites and it is not clear which guidance they will follow. A spokeswoman for Bolton clinical commissioning group suggested there would be no immediate offer of vaccinations to over-18s. “We continue to follow the JCVI guidelines,” she said.

Dominic Harrison, the director of public health for Blackburn with Darwen council, said he was extremely disappointed that the government had not given the go-ahead to vaccinating all over-16s in the worst-hit neighbourhoods.

He told the Guardian: “It just seems that failing to do all we can in the areas that have the highest rates now is a lost opportunity and we will be saying that to ministers on Monday. What we still haven’t got is a clear national strategy for managing importations and outbreaks of new variants at a local level. There just is no strategy.

“It feels like we are making it up on the hoof and you’ve now got Scotland and England giving two different plans of action on the basis of very similar data.”

Responding to the spread of the India variant in Scotland, the first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced that infection rates in Glasgow and Moray meant the areas would remain on level 3 restrictions while the rest of the mainland dropped to level 2 on Monday, which means hugging loved ones and meeting indoors is allowed. She said she was “pretty sure” that the vaccination programme in Scotland would be accelerated, but that she was waiting for advice from the JCVI.

The Welsh first minister, Mark Drakeford, also said he had decided against liberalising rules that would have let more people mix and some small public events go ahead.

[Vaccinate vulnerable global poor before rich children, WHO says](#)
[Read more](#)

The chief executive of the NHS Confederation, Danny Mortimer, on Friday called for the government to “look at measures around lifting lockdown”. He said ministers should consider whether allowing international travel from 17 May should be “rethought” and giving greater financial support to those who test positive to encourage them to self-isolate.

New figures from the Office for National Statistics on Friday showed the number of infected people across the UK continued to fall, but the R number – the average number of people someone with Covid is estimated to pass it on to – rose slightly in England to 0.8-1.1.

A Guardian analysis of Public [Health](#) England data shows overall Covid cases have risen in four out of 10 UK local authorities in the week to 8 May, with some areas seeing steep rises. The analysis found 151 of 382 local authorities had higher weekly case rates per 100,000 residents compared with the previous seven days, accounting for 39.5% of all areas. Of these, 97 councils had seen cases rise for two consecutive weeks.

Coronavirus

India variant could lead to serious third wave of Covid in UK

Analysis: If B.1.617.2 proves highly transmissible, hospitalisations could peak again, models show

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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NHS staff prepare a temporary Covid ward in a London hospital in late December 2020. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

NHS staff prepare a temporary Covid ward in a London hospital in late December 2020. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

[Ian Sample](#) *Science editor*

[@iansample](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 11.58 EDT

It was all looking so good. After a brutal second wave in the winter, the lockdown combined with the swift rollout of vaccines forced infections, hospitalisations and deaths down to levels not seen since last summer. The vaccines performed better than expected, not only in preventing deaths, but in hampering the spread of the virus. Scientific advisers were confident about England's cautious roadmap back to a life more normal: the worst, it seemed, was over.

Now, those same advisers are [deeply worried](#) that the new variant of concern from India, B.1.617.2, could undermine the hard-won achievement. The government strategy has been to ease restrictions as vaccines reach more people, aiming for a delicate balance that opens up society while preventing another wave that overwhelms the NHS.

Without the new variant, outbreak modellers advising Sage anticipated a modest third wave in July and August, with perhaps 4,000 to 11,000 more deaths, but nothing on the scale of the devastating winter wave.

[What can England do to combat the Indian Covid variant?](#)
[Read more](#)

But the new variant is here. What that means is still uncertain. Take the outbreak in Bolton and surrounding areas out of the picture and the situation in England looks far less alarming, suggesting the region may be an outlier. Yet some scientists working on B.1.617.2 believe it is destined to displace the dominant and highly transmissible Kent variant, B.1.1.7, in the UK and note that charts displaying the steep rise in cases look horribly similar to those that tracked the surge of the Kent variant in December.

Their concerns are backed by the Sage committee, which advised ministers on 5 May that pushing down cases of variant infections was now a “priority for policy”. A highly transmissible variant – one that spreads more easily than the Kent variant – “could lead to a very significant wave of infections, potentially larger than that seen in January 2021 if there were no interventions,” the experts said.

Epidemiologists are still wrestling with how transmissible the India variant of concern is. Public [Health](#) England believes it is at least as transmissible as

the Kent variant, but preliminary work based on genome sequencing in India raises the prospect of it spreading up to 60% more easily.

To get some idea of what a faster-spreading variant could mean for the months ahead, modelling teams that feed into Sage worked up [different scenarios](#). Assuming the vaccines hold up, more people could be hospitalised than in the first wave – putting the NHS at risk – if the variant is much more than 30% more transmissible, University of Warwick models show. At 40% more transmissible, hospitalisations could reach 6,000 per day, far above the peak of the second wave, and 10,000 per day if the variant is 50% more transmissible.

That is if we do nothing. If step three [easing of restrictions in England](#) on Monday is cancelled, the third wave will be far more modest, reaching 300 hospitalisations per day, even if the virus spreads 50% more easily than the Kent version. Holding off on step four on 21 June may be less effective: under that scenario a variant little more than 40% more transmissible could trigger more daily hospitalisations than seen in either UK waves so far.

02:00

Johnson: India Covid variant could jeopardise June reopening – video

A third wave of the coronavirus will drive people into hospital despite the mass vaccination programme. While the vast majority of older and more vulnerable people have been inoculated, the vaccines are not 100% protective, and do not work in everyone. As a result, scientific advisers expect many of those hospitalised in the third wave to be vaccinated, just not well protected from their shots.

[What we know about the Indian Covid variant so far | Julian Tang](#)
[Read more](#)

Millions more have not yet been called for their jabs. Among those will be people unaware they are clinically vulnerable. And so more deaths will duly follow. Modelling from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, seen by Sage on 5 May, found that a 50% more transmissible variant could trigger a third wave with deaths peaking at 1,000 per day in late July. We have not seen those kinds of numbers since February.

Deaths are not all that matters. The decision to vaccinate older people first was based on saving lives and preventing the collapse of the [NHS](#). The trade-off is more infections in younger, healthy people, and while they are much less likely to die from the disease they are at real risk of long Covid, in which patients continue to suffer from fatigue, brain fog and other debilitating symptoms long after they have overcome the virus itself.

So far, surge testing for B.1.617.2 and telling infected people and their contacts to isolate has not brought the variant under control, but it is a crucial part of the effort. **Beyond this, ministers are looking to ramp up vaccinations in outbreak areas.** In theory this could help by getting jabs to the old and vulnerable who have so far not come forward, and by slowing transmission, particularly if the vaccines are given to younger people who mix more.

But the protection from a vaccine comes two to three weeks after having the shot, by which time the variant may have spread far beyond the main clusters to areas where cases are still low. It may backfire if vaccines are diverted from low case regions to where the variant is now rife. The decision for ministers is how best to use the vaccine, and the answer is not straightforward.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Indian Covid variant: which countries have highest infection rates?

Some data suggests variant has ‘increased transmissibility’ compared with other strains

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A public health digital board warns of a Covid-19 variant of concern affecting the community in Bolton, north-west England. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty

A public health digital board warns of a Covid-19 variant of concern affecting the community in Bolton, north-west England. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty

[Tobi Thomas](#) and [Ashley Kirk](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 11.45 EDT

The World Health Organization said on Tuesday the Indian Covid-19 variant was [a global concern](#), with some data suggesting the variant has “increased transmissibility” compared with other strains.

Outside India, the UK has recorded the highest number of cases of the Indian variant, at 1,587 cases to date. The US, Singapore and Germany are the only other countries to have sequenced more than 100 cases of the B.1.617+ variant, according to the [Gisaid Initiative](#).

These numbers are only the number of recorded sequenced cases and, as most global cases are not sequenced, such numbers will be a drastic undercounting of the real number of cases of the variant around the world.

There are also national disparities in sequencing rates. The UK sequences a large proportion of its positive Covid-19 cases and therefore recording a higher number of variants as a result.

Recorded cases of the variant have been found on every continent, with Asia so far recording the highest total. European countries have sequenced almost 2,000 cases of the variant across 21 countries – the majority of which are in the UK.

[Global map of Indian variant numbers](#)

Here is a roundup of the countries with the highest rates of the Indian variant.

US

The US has detected 486 cases of the Indian variant, approximately half of which were detected in the last four weeks. From 4 May, travellers from India, with the exception of legal permanent residents, spouses and close family members of US citizens, have been prohibited from entering the country. Despite the India-variant cases, the US has continued to ease coronavirus restrictions due to its vaccination programme. Joe Biden [announced on Thursday](#) that people who had been vaccinated would not be required to wear masks in most indoor and outdoor settings.

Singapore

Singapore has detected 156 cases of the India variant, more than two-thirds of which were identified within the past four weeks. As a result, Singapore has introduced new lockdown measures. From 16 May to 13 June, gatherings and household visitors have been reduced to two people from five, workers have been instructed to work from home, and indoor dining has been halted.

[India Covid variant: is it a threat to the UK's reopening plans?](#)
[Read more](#)

Germany

Germany has detected 103 cases of the Indian variant. More than 60% were detected within the past four weeks.

A report published by Germany's Robert Koch Institute on Wednesday suggested that the proportion of the variant in the country "has been steadily increasing in recent weeks". In late April, Germany introduced a travel ban from India with the exception of citizens and residents.

Germany is continuing to ease restrictions, and the government said on Friday that the number of infections per 100,000 had fallen to 96.5, the first time it had fallen below 100 since 20 March.

Australia

Australia has detected 85 cases of the Indian variant. On Friday, the country introduced [coronavirus restrictions](#) for New South Wales and greater Sydney, to last until 17 May. They include prohibitions on more than 20 people gathering in private homes and compulsory mask-wearing in all public indoor spaces.

Denmark

Denmark has confirmed 39 cases of the Indian variant, 11 in the last four weeks. Tyra Grove Krause, the director of the State Serum Institute, Denmark's national infection disease agency, said the variant was not currently a cause for concern within Denmark. Since [21 April](#), bars, cafes, restaurants, and other venues have been open to anyone who can show a negative test result taken within 72 hours or has been vaccinated.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/14/indian-covid-variant-which-countries-have-highest-infection-rates>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Coronavirus

What can England do to combat the Indian Covid variant?

A list of possible measures that could be taken by the government to limit the spread of the variant

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A member of the public receives a Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre in Bolton on Friday. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty

A member of the public receives a Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre in Bolton on Friday. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty

[*Peter Walker*](#)

[*@peterwalker99*](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 12.54 EDT

The possible spread of the highly transmissible B.1.617.2 variant of Covid, first identified in India, threatens to hamper the timetable for removing lockdown restrictions, since a series of [localised outbreaks have been detected](#).

Here are some possible actions that could be used to limit the spread of the variant:

Surge testing

This is the strategy under which small areas are targeted for mass tests of as many people as possible, including those with no symptoms or any suggestion they have been in contact with a Covid carrier.

It has been used previously to try to detect the spread of another fast-spreading Covid variant, first detected in South Africa. Last month, it was launched [in a number of London boroughs](#), involving the use of door-to-door testing and an enhanced system for tracing contacts of people who are positive.

Surge testing, with associated genome sequencing to identify the spread of variants, has become the default response to such variants, and is now taking place in 15 locations across [England](#), the Department of Health and Social Care has said.

It is being used in areas affected by the India variant. The army is assisting with the efforts, for example by handing out self-testing kits to residents.

Surge vaccinations

This is a notably more recent development. While the national rollout of coronavirus vaccinations has progressed quickly, it has been prioritised by age and clinical vulnerability, rather than on factors such as location or job. Ministers and public health officials have argued that this is necessary to streamline the process.

While the cut-off age for eligibility is currently 38, it appears likely we could see areas where everyone 18 and above will be offered injections. The vaccines minister, Nadhim Zahawi, said on Friday the government would “flex the vaccine programme” as needed.

There is definitely [local demand](#). At one point on Thursday, Blackburn with Darwen council said all over-18s in the district could book a vaccine from next week, before reversing the plan. But sources in other areas affected by the India variant suggest similar plans could be put into effect.

But at a Downing Street press conference on Friday, Boris Johnson said the only change in affected areas such as Bolton would be to encourage more take-up of vaccines for those eligible, and to accelerate second vaccinations across the country for over-50s and those seen as clinically vulnerable.

Local lockdowns

These have never been enormously popular with ministers, and it is notable that when Boris Johnson imposed the third national lockdown for England early in the new year, there was an end to the system of regional “tiers” with different levels of restrictions.

As well as the tiers, which placed areas into pre-set categories of lockdown, ministers have also used one-off local restrictions to combat surges in cases.

But both ideas have proved controversial. Complaints have included the size of tiered areas, with entire counties placed into higher levels because of localised outbreaks, as well as the impact on hospitality venues and other businesses.

In October, the tier system threatened to [descend into chaos](#) as leaders in north-west England, led by the Greater Manchester mayor, Andy Burnham, openly rejected a move to a higher restriction level. There are also questions about the [efficacy of localised rules](#) given that people will travel in and out.

It is nonetheless possible that areas affected by the India variant could have some more limited local rule changes, such as secondary school students being asked to continue to wear masks while others elsewhere are not.

Delaying the national reopening

There are no plans to change the easing of restrictions that come into force next week, including the reopening of indoor hospitality and some non-essential overseas travel, Johnson said on Friday.

However, he warned that the India variant “could pose a serious disruption to our progress” in pressing ahead with the much broader measures due from 21 June, which is meant to be the moment for the end of social distancing measures and the reopening of venues such as nightclubs.

Ministers have always held open the option of delaying stages of this process if infections rise, and one of the four tests in place for assessing next steps is about the presence of new variants.

Johnson would almost certainly face a political backlash if the roadmap’s 21 June plan were delayed or scaled back significantly, especially if the evidence remained that vaccines were effective against the India variant. There could be also be mitigating measures, such as the use of internal Covid certificates, showing vaccination or a negative test, to access some venues and events.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/14/what-can-england-do-to-combat-the-indian-covid-variant>

2021.05.15 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus news: England to continue lockdown easing; Taiwan raises Covid alert; Australia runs first repatriation flight from India](#)
- [Taiwan Country records 180 new cases in island's worst outbreak of pandemic](#)
- [WHO Vaccinate vulnerable global poor before children in rich countries](#)
- [Australia How a proudly multicultural country became a pandemic fortress](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Coronavirus: Trinidad and Tobago declares state of emergency; England to continue lockdown easing despite India variant fears

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Taiwan

Taiwan records 180 new cases in island's worst Covid outbreak of pandemic

New restrictions, including a mandate on mask-wearing and limits on gatherings in the capital, Taipei, will stay in place for two weeks

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Medical staff at a rapid Covid-19 test station in Wanhua, Taipei set up after a rare outbreak. Photograph: Annabelle Chih/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Medical staff at a rapid Covid-19 test station in Wanhua, Taipei set up after a rare outbreak. Photograph: Annabelle Chih/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[*Helen Davidson*](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Sat 15 May 2021 02.07 EDT

Taiwan has reported 180 new cases of Covid-19 as it rushes to contain the worst outbreak the island has seen since the pandemic began. Authorities have raised the alert level in Taipei and the neighbouring county of New Taipei, limiting family gatherings, and ordering numerous industries to close.

Taiwan has been [one of the world's pandemic success stories](#), and its case numbers remain low relative to outbreaks around the world. But Saturday's cases, which bring its total number so far to about 1,470 among a population of 24 million, mark the highest rates of community transmission since the pandemic began. Until now almost all of Taiwan's cases were detected in new arrivals held in hotel quarantine.

Of the 180 cases, 132 were reportedly without a known source. There were 89 were recorded in Taipei city, 75 in New Taipei and the rest scattered in other counties.

The current wave is believed to have jumped to the community from staff at China Airlines and an airport quarantine hotel late last month. In the past fortnight at least 265 cases have been diagnosed – more than 77% of Taiwan's total number of local cases since the pandemic began.

[Taiwan waives Covid quarantine fine for man who was kidnapped](#)
[Read more](#)

At a press conference on Saturday, Premier Su Tseng-chang and cabinet ministers announced the lifting of the alert level for Taipei and New Taipei from two to three, on a four-level scale, where four establishes a lockdown. Beginning 4pm Saturday they will remain in place until 28 May, authorities said.

According to [guidelines](#) published in local media, level 3 generally includes mandatory mask wearing in public, limits on outdoor gatherings to 10 and indoor gatherings to five, and the closure of all businesses except essential services, law enforcement, government services, and health services.

However in Saturday's announcement, food and beverage outlets were only ordered to close if they could not fully implement customer ID registration

and social distancing measures. Customers were urged to choose takeout over dining in. Weddings and funerals have not been cancelled but will require registration of attendees, and the limits on gatherings did not apply to schools or work.

Within hours of the announcement some supermarkets were mobbed by shoppers, despite no apparent suggestion that supermarkets would close. Food delivery service UberEats alerted customers it would immediately shift to contactless delivery.

Scenes at a grocery store in Taipei, only 30 minutes after new Level 3 pandemic restrictions were announced. Shelves are empty. Checkout lines are snaking around the building. The wait is 1+ hour and getting longer □ pic.twitter.com/YuzQtp4Zv3

— Leslie V. Nguyen-Okwu 阮蕾 (@lnguyenokwu) [May 15, 2021](#)

Under the general guidelines, residents in neighbourhoods where community transmission has occurred - for example in Taipei's Wanhua district which is at the centre of a major cluster - must stay within defined perimeters and comply with testing. Schools and public gatherings in the neighbourhood would also be suspended.

Residents of Wanhua, where the outbreak was originally centred around several hostess bars and tea houses linked to the sex work industry, have been reporting in droves to rapid testing clinics since Friday. Authorities have promised law enforcement has no intention of targeting sex workers or undocumented migrants.

Among Saturday's reported cases, just 43 were in Wanhua.

[Hugs, sequins and rainbows as Taiwan enjoys victory over coronavirus](#)
[Read more](#)

The rest of Taiwan remains on alert level 2 but entertainment, beauty, fitness and leisure venues have been ordered to close and religious gatherings banned. The Taiwan-Palau travel bubble has also been suspended until 8

June, and Hong Kong has increased its quarantine requirements for anyone arriving from Taiwan.

The health minister, Chen Shih-chung, said alert level 4 would not be triggered unless there were 100 or more daily cases for 14 consecutive days, correcting an earlier statement where he said it would occur after seven.

The outbreak has caught Taiwan by surprise, after almost 18 months with no major incident. The island state [established border controls early on](#) and runs a strict hotel and home quarantine system. However like several nations in the Pacific which had similar success, the country has a low vaccination rate, at least partly due to struggles convincing its population to get vaccinated. While the rollout has prioritised vulnerable and high risk groups, in recent weeks health services have offered self-paid vaccines to the general public in order to use up doses before they expire. On Friday president Tsai Ing-wen announced Taiwan's first locally developed vaccine would be available by July.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/15/taiwan-records-180-new-cases-in-islands-worst-covid-outbreak-of-pandemic>

Coronavirus

Vaccinate vulnerable global poor before children in rich countries, WHO says

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urges developed world to donate Covid vaccines to Covax programme

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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The World Health Organization's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Photograph: Reuters

The World Health Organization's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Photograph: Reuters

Staff and agencies in Geneva

Fri 14 May 2021 13.59 EDT

The WHO has urged wealthy countries to reconsider plans to vaccinate children against Covid-19 and instead to donate doses to poorer nations, while warning that the pandemic's second year looks set to be more deadly.

The World Health Organization's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, voiced outrage that a number of rich countries were now vaccinating children and teenagers while poorer states had barely begun vaccinating health workers and their most vulnerable groups.

Instead of offering jabs to young and healthy people, countries should give their doses to the Covax global vaccine-sharing scheme and thereby ensure that those most in need in all countries receive protection, he said.

"In January, [I spoke about](#) the potential unfolding of a moral catastrophe," he told a press conference. "Unfortunately, we're now witnessing this play out. In a handful of rich countries, which bought up the majority of the supply, lower-risk groups are now being vaccinated.

"I understand why some countries want to vaccinate their children and adolescents, but right now I urge them to reconsider and to instead donate vaccines to Covax.

[Picture of two pandemics: Covid cases fall in rich west as poorer nations suffer](#)

[Read more](#)

"Because in low- and lower-middle-income countries, Covid-19 vaccine supply has not been enough to even immunise healthcare workers, and hospitals are being inundated with people that need lifesaving care urgently."

The WHO is hoping more countries will follow France and Sweden in donating shots to Covax after inoculating their priority populations, to help address a gulf in vaccination rates.

Canada and the US are among countries that have authorised vaccines for use in adolescents in recent weeks. However, a WHO official said talks with Washington on sharing doses were under way.

Nearly 1.4bn doses of Covid-19 vaccines have been injected in at least 210 territories around the world, according to an AFP count. Some 44% of those have been administered in high-income countries, accounting for 16% of the global population.

Just 0.3% have been administered in the 29 lowest-income countries, home to 9% of the world's population.

In the face of this inequity in access, Tedros warned that the world would probably see more deaths this year than last, despite the arrival of vaccines. "We're on track for the second year of this pandemic to be far more deadly than the first," he said. "Saving lives and livelihoods with a combination of public health measures and vaccination – not one or the other – is the only way out."

The coronavirus has killed at least 3.3 million people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP.

Tedros, 56, said he had been vaccinated against Covid-19 earlier this week in Geneva, the Swiss city where the WHO is based. "It was a bittersweet moment," he said, explaining that his thoughts were with health workers around the world who had been battling the pandemic. "The fact that so many are still not protected is a sad reflection on the gross distortion in access to vaccines across the globe."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/14/vaccinate-vulnerable-global-poor-before-rich-children-who-says>

[The Observer](#)[Australia news](#)

The hermit kingdom: how a proudly multicultural country became ‘fortress Australia’

As Covid wreaks havoc overseas Australia risks regressing culturally and economically if borders don’t reopen



A recent Lowy Institute showed only one third of Australians believe the government should do more to repatriate citizens. Photograph: baona/Getty Images/iStockphoto

A recent Lowy Institute showed only one third of Australians believe the government should do more to repatriate citizens. Photograph: baona/Getty Images/iStockphoto



[Elias Visontay](#)

[@EliasVisontay](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 16.00 EDT

Tony Sammartino has no idea when he will next hug his three-year-old daughter, but it's almost guaranteed it won't be for another year at the earliest.

"These are the best years of her life, and they should be the best of mine too. And they're slipping away."

Tony hasn't seen Maria Teresa, nor her mother and his partner, Maria Pena, since March 2020, when he was in the [Philippines](#) with their other daughter, Liliana.

Before the pandemic, the family of four split their lives between Melbourne and Subic, a coastal city north-west of Manila, spending roughly half a year in each parent's home country.

Now, the Sammartinos are one of countless Australian families that find themselves separated by an almost hermetically-sealed border, an enduring aspect of Australia's harsh response to the pandemic that continues to

prevent even its own citizens from freely returning to or leaving their country.

Some 40,000 Australians have at any one time remained stranded overseas, missing births, funerals, losing jobs, and even [dying from Covid](#) despite pleas for help to return home.



Tony Sammartino and his daughter Maria Teresa (left) and his partner Maria Pena (right.) Photograph: Sammo/Tony Sammartino

As countries around the world vaccinate their populations and reopen to freer travel, Australia – which has recorded 910 deaths from Covid-19 and zero community transmission for most of this year – is progressively tightening its borders.

The hardline approach appears to have gained support among the Australian public, with demographers and sociologists observing Australian leaders' attitudes towards risk management had shifted Australians' views about being global citizens, with other experts pondering: what does it say about the collective Australian psyche that a proudly multicultural country can be so supportive of such strict border closures?

‘There has to be a solution sooner’

At the beginning of the pandemic, a permit system was introduced for those wanting to leave Australia, with even some compassionate pleas rejected.

A strict mandatory hotel quarantine system was introduced to absorb an influx of returning citizens – about one million Australians lived overseas pre-pandemic.

Then in July 2020, a cap was placed on the number of people quarantine hotels would process, leading to months of flight cancellations, and an almost impossible equation for airlines to remain profitable on Australian routes.

Seat prices on airlines that continued to fly into the country soared by tens of thousands of dollars, with jumbos flying as few as 20 passengers per flight.

Meanwhile, the prime minister, Scott Morrison, routinely rejected calls to build purpose-built facilities to repatriate more citizens, insisting state governments were responsible for quarantine.

The country's border crackdown peaked at the end of April this year, when Morrison used sweeping biosecurity laws [to issue a directive threatening to imprison any citizens](#) who attempted to fly to Australia from India via a third country while a temporary direct flight ban was in place during the recent outbreak.

While a travel bubble was established with New Zealand in April, repeated delays to Australia's vaccine rollout have made the government hesitant to announce a timeframe to reopen its borders.

After the government revealed an assumption in its annual budget last week that the border would remain shut to international travel until after mid-2022, Tony is struggling with the lack of outrage at the policy.

"I haven't really absorbed that, because I know for me there has to be a solution sooner, it can't take that long for them to come home."

Like many Australians, Tony's partner was born overseas, and was not a citizen or permanent resident when the pandemic began. As the parent of an Australian born child, she could apply for a visa and exemption to

Australia's border ban on all non-citizens, however she cares for a child from a previous relationship in the Philippines, who would not be able to gain entry to Australia.

Meanwhile, Maria Teresa is too young to travel alone, while Tony cannot secure an exemption and flights for him to travel to escort her to Australia, where he had been planning to enrol her in preschool. He does not want to risk becoming stranded in the Philippines indefinitely.

This hasn't stopped Tony waking up at 4am most mornings from the stress of his situation, and going online to search for flights. He has become obsessed with flight radars, to monitor the few passenger flights that still enter Australia each day, to calculate how many passengers they are carrying and what a route home for his daughter and partner might look like.

"I just don't have the money to fly there, and pay \$11,000 each to fly home, and then quarantine (about \$5,000). If you had money, could you get here easily," he said, a reference to [international celebrities who have paid their way into Australia](#).

The family FaceTime call everyday, but Tony is worried their other daughter, Liliana, is losing interest in her mother, frustrated she is missing milestones in her life.

"The embassy in Manila doesn't help, but they sent us a link to a charter flight company in Hong Kong. The government has left us on our own. They haven't beaten Covid at all, they've just shut us off entirely from it," Tony said.

A 'Noah's Ark model of survival'

Only one-third of Australians believe the government should do more to repatriate citizens, [a recent Lowy Institute poll showed](#), and the Morrison government appears to be banking on the political safety of a harsh border policy as a federal election looms on the horizon.

Dr Liz Allen, a demographer at the Australian National University, said the popularity of Australia's Covid strategy was not surprising.

She said despite the fact that about one in three Australians born overseas, “protectionist narratives have operated quite successfully in Australia”, particularly because of an older population.

Prof Andrew Jakubowicz, a sociologist at the University of Technology Sydney, is not surprised by the “cognitive dissonance” occurring in a multicultural nation supportive of the border closures.

“Something deep in the Australian psyche is the memory of how easy it was to invade this place, the idea that the moment you let them in, you’re in trouble,” he said.

Jakubowicz pointed out that migrants to Australia are often the most opposed to further migration. “There’s a long history of pulling the gate shut once they’re through the door.

“It’s this learned apprehension of letting in, it’s allowed us to accept hardline immigration policies in the past, and it’s allowed us to reprogram quickly to the stress of being stuck here in the pandemic.

['Shattered, heartbroken, financially ruined': stranded Australians plead for help](#)
[Read more](#)

“The government has looked at the states’ popularity with their borders, and it’s comfortable with this Noah’s Ark model of survival,” Jakubowicz said.

Allen agrees, and believes the government’s strategy plays into Australians’ sense of security.

“Australia has not done anything marvellous or miraculous in containing Covid, it’s been about geography and dumb luck. We’ve dug a hole and stuck our head in it and that’s where we will remain.

“We like to view ourselves as larrikins and irreverent people who stand up to authority, but in reality we are scared, we’re petrified. We’ve become so comfortable because of our geography that we’re losing our greatness.

“We’re not even able to have a conversation about risk, the government is too scared of championing new quarantine facilities out of fear if something goes wrong,” she said.

Allen believes the country “risks regressing” both culturally and economically without reopening to immigration, tourism and family reunions.

On Friday, a coalition of business, law, arts and academic figures echoed this call, [urging the government](#) to adopt a “living with Covid” strategy to avoid reputational damage to Australia.

“Australia benefits tremendously from our migrants and tourism. Year on year, this country has spruiked the wondrous kind of living conditions in this place to all corners of the world, to come join us.”

“But now, so many who have made Australia their home, and taken a risk on us, we tell them to go home. Well they were home,” Allen said.

Forced into financial ruin

This sentiment is [shared by Vamshi Parepalli](#), who lives in Melbourne with his wife Shruthi having gained permanent residency status. In December, the couple gained an exemption and travelled to India to care for his mother in Hyderabad, having failed to get approval for her to come to them in Australia.



Australian citizens Shruthi and Vamshi Parepalli have been unable to return to Australia after the federal government criminalised returning from India. Composite: Shruthi and Vamshi Parepalli

They have now become stuck amid India's devastating outbreak. Not only have there been no direct flights home, they face a \$66,600 fine and five years in jail if they attempt to return via a third country.

"How can it be criminal to return to our home? To be honest, I feel like it was a dream when I got my residency and stepped into Australia, and now it looks like it really was just a dream," Vamshi said.

In other countries, Australians left in limbo have been unable to work, forcing some into financial ruin.



Keagan Vowels, 13, spent months living in a camper van with his siblings and parents in his cousin's yard in England. Photograph: Supplied by the family

The Vowels, a family of seven who live near the city of Newcastle, north of Sydney, [spent more than half a year living in a camper van](#) in their cousin's backyard in Crawley, England, after their initial flights home from a family holiday were cancelled. Intense media pressure saw them offered flights home that would have otherwise cost them \$113,000.

However, Andre Rivenell is [still living in a camper van](#). He has been stuck with his wife in Texas since their initial flight home was cancelled when the pandemic first hit. His health deteriorated after a stroke and diagnosis of a chronic autoimmune neuromuscular disease, and he cannot afford healthcare in the US.

He hopes to return home to see his son before he dies, however the Australian government did not approve him for an emergency loan initiative for vulnerable Australians stranded overseas.



‘We’re penniless,’ says Andre Rivenell, who along with his wife has been forced to live in a camper van in his mother-in-law’s backyard in Texas. Photograph: Rivenell family

Meanwhile, Tony Sammartino was met with backlash from someone in his local park after hearing his family was separated – a perception those overseas travelled frivolously and have had time to come home.

He is worried this is representative of a larger lack of political support for any change in the policies.

Allen believes the public backlash against those stranded is linked to “an arrogance that we’ve fought a pandemic and won a war”.

“We didn’t win a war, we’ve just bunkered down. We’re a bunch of preppers, and we’ve gone in with baked beans and tinned spaghetti. There’s so much more to life than baked beans and tinned spaghetti.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/14/the-hermit-kingdom-how-a-proudly-multicultural-country-became-fortress-australia>

2021.05.15 - Spotlight

- 'He grabbed the lead and said: give me the dog' Can pet detectives stop the rise in animal theft?
- Cush Jumbo 'He's doing less screen time but being paid three times more? Er, no!'
- 'Have a little empathy' Bali tires of badly behaved foreign influencers
- Hamlet! James Bond! Lady Gaga! The cultural events we've waited too long for

Dogs

‘He grabbed the lead and said: give me the dog’: can pet detectives stop the rise in animal theft?



Amanda Hall, Anita Wingad and Sarah Wood of DogHorn Weymouth, who wear hi-vis and carry whistles to deter thieves. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Amanda Hall, Anita Wingad and Sarah Wood of DogHorn Weymouth, who wear hi-vis and carry whistles to deter thieves. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Dogs are more valuable than ever – which is why so many are being snatched. But some owners and pet detectives are fighting back



[Sam Wollaston](#)

[@samwollaston](#)

Sat 15 May 2021 03.00 EDT

The village of Partridge Green in West Sussex on a gorgeous spring morning. The early mist has burnt off; a wood pigeon coos; a flurry of pink snow falls from a showy cherry tree; outside the butcher's, an orderly, socially distanced queue has formed; a chap out for a morning spin motors along the high street in his vintage MG. It is, as my companion, Colin Butcher, says, a scene straight out of Midsomer Murders.

There are no murders today in Partridge Green, but it is a crime scene, and the crime is one that appears to be [sweeping the nation](#). Butcher – ex-police (you can tell), then private investigator, now company director and chief investigator of [The UK Pet Detectives](#) – is on the case. He steps from his Range Rover wearing a fleece with an official-looking badge and “UKPD” emblazoned across the back; a twist on NYPD, except PD stands for Pet Detective. “I know the impact of seeing that UKPD – it’s such an international sign,” he says later, putting the jacket on before knocking at an address linked to his main suspect.

We're getting ahead of ourselves, though. Butcher has been hunting for stolen dogs since his time in the police; his first successful assignment was the recovery of two German shepherd puppies taken from a breeder's kennels in 1994 while he was serving as a detective sergeant with Surrey police. Now his services are available privately, and have been highly sought after this past year. The rise in demand for dogs during the pandemic is [well documented](#), with a corresponding leap in the prices people are prepared to pay for them. And tagging along at the heel of the economic bubble are new opportunities for crime – with one survey putting dog theft up by a fifth over lockdown. The Pet Detective is busy right now.



Pet detective Colin Butcher with a missing poster for stolen dogs Reggie and Ruby. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

To the scene of the crime, then: the corner of Oakwood and Littleworth Lane. Here, exactly three weeks ago, two English springer spaniels were running loose. A passing local stopped, hoping to catch them and find the owner. But at the same time, a small truck – a red Nissan Cabstar – also stopped. One of the two men in the vehicle got out, said they knew the dogs and would take them home, and bundled them into the truck. Ruby and Reggie, mother and son spaniels, were not returned home.

Butcher thinks it was an opportunistic snatch, but these too are part of the coronavirus crime wave, driven by the rise in prices. He points out the security camera on the side of a house that captured the incident.

Next stop, just round the corner, is the home of Donna Botting, owner of Ruby and Reggie. Ronnie, her third springer spaniel, hasn't been the same since, Botting says; he's pining for his family. Ronnie is Reggie's father.

Botting was at her mum's when she got a call from a neighbour saying that the dogs were out. The latch on the living room window was broken, and a panel of the garden fence had come down in a recent gale. When Botting got home, Ronnie had come back in through the window, but Ruby and Reggie were nowhere to be found. She searched the village, calling for them, "completely beside myself", she says.

There just wasn't any crime for criminals to commit. The pandemic has displaced an awful lot of burglars across to dog theft

She posted on the village Facebook page: "Has anyone seen my dogs?" People were kind and helpful, checking their CCTV, spreading the word. Botting, a nursing assistant at East Surrey hospital, moved to Partridge Green recently, after the breakup of her marriage. Her dogs are everything to her; she has three paws tattooed on her forearm. She describes a particularly gruelling recent shift on a Covid ward, when the last task of the day was to zip someone into a body bag. "I was literally sobbing driving home. I thought, this is ridiculous, pull yourself together, I've been here so many times, why has this one got to me so much? I walked in, and the dogs just went mental, licking my face, and I stopped feeling sad, 'cos I had purpose with the dogs. I went to bed and felt calm and relaxed. Of course, they all went to bed with me, which is the usual."

Butcher plans to get maximum traction from what Botting does for a living, hoping it will appeal to people's sense of decency and help get the dogs back. "I am a nurse working on an intensive care ward looking after very sick people who have the virus," his poster reads. That goes out on his own social media platforms, and is then shared among groups of dog lovers. He also has a network of volunteers around the country – they might be

veterinary nurses or breeders – that he can ask to make discreet inquiries in their area after a dog theft.

Butcher understands the power of social media. Old media, too – this is by no means his newspaper debut, and he’s often on the telly, usually accompanied by his own spaniel, Molly. Botting says it was someone on Facebook who told her about Butcher. “And my aunt messaged me and said, ‘I’ve seen this man on the telly, get him involved,’” she says. Normally he charges £100 an hour, but there’s no charge for Botting because of her job. Plus, it’s a good story.



Donna Botting with Ronnie in her back garden – her other two dogs, Reggie and Ruby, were stolen in March. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Botting called the police the morning after her dogs went missing. An officer came the following day and took a statement. But she hasn’t been overly impressed by their activity, or lack of it. Butcher says he works alongside the police, trying not to step on their toes. And he understands that they’re under-resourced, and don’t have the community networks or specialist knowledge that he has. Also they have to gather evidence in order to build a case and get a prosecution. “That’s not my job – my job is to get dogs back for people who are really distressed.”

But he uses skills from his own time in CID. He once did a four-week hostage negotiation course and he says he used that knowledge on a recent case of a stolen corgi. The dog thief was a hardened criminal: “Two or three stretches of serious prison time, drug dealing, crimes of violence – he had zero reason to negotiate with me. So I negotiated through his daughter and his wife. I made damn sure they knew the owner of the corgi was 95 years old.” The corgi, Amber, is now back home.

Intelligence has begun to come in about the disappearance of Ruby and Reggie; about the Nissan truck and its occupants. The day after the theft, there was another incident involving the same vehicle at a post office in a neighbouring village. Then a police raid in Surrey recovered 10 stolen dogs, but Ruby and Reggie weren't among them. Botting received an anonymous phone call: a woman told her she knew who had taken her dogs, and where the truck was parked, on a Traveller site. But the police said they couldn't act on a third-party tipoff. So Butcher, the home counties' very own Ace Ventura, is going to make some inquiries of his own. And I'm going with him.

Dog theft is a lucrative business. The pandemic has seen the doubling, tripling and more of prices (I've heard rumours of £10,000 for an English bulldog puppy). People want dogs and will pay lots of money for them. There are other factors, too. New legislation known as [Lucy's law](#), named after a cavalier King Charles spaniel which was rescued from terrible conditions at a puppy farm, came into force last year. It bans the third-party sales of puppies, meaning you must buy directly from a breeder, or adopt from an animal shelter. It clamps down on puppy farms and people bringing puppies into the country from abroad. Organised gangs importing dogs from Ireland and other countries have also been restricted by Brexit and the pandemic.

And lockdown has been tough on career criminals like burglars; it's hard to break into a house when everyone is at home. “There just wasn't any crime for them to commit, so they either sat at home without any money or they adapted,” says Butcher. “The pandemic has displaced an awful lot of criminals across to dog theft.”

It's hard to put accurate numbers on it, but Butcher reckons about 15 dogs a day are stolen in the UK. A [survey by Direct Line](#) estimates that 2,438 dogs were reported stolen to police forces across the UK in 2020, and that dog theft increased by 19% over lockdown. Spaniels, bulldogs, staffies and labradors were the breeds most targeted. Only 22% were reunited with their owners.

You never stop hoping you're going to get that call to say, 'We've got your dog'

[DogLost](#), a volunteer-run website that attempts to reunite owners with their missing dogs for nothing, has seen a [170% increase in reported dog thefts](#) – from 172 cases in 2019 to 465 in 2020. And the figures for 2021 are already well up on last year's.

One reason the numbers are hard to track is that a single crime might involve the theft of more than one dog. "So if a bunch of puppies are stolen, you get one crime reference number that the police allocate to that specific theft," says Wayne May, a director of DogLost. May, speaking to me from his tractor on a farm in Kent, has been volunteering at DogLost since he had six dogs stolen from his home in 2008. (He subsequently got three of them back.)

Kennels and the breeders themselves are increasingly being targeted, says Butcher. He estimates that specialist dog thieves are now responsible for around three-quarters of thefts, and that it's easy for them to find out who particular breeders are, and where they are based. "The amount of information available on the internet for organised criminals – that is why we are seeing such a large number of premises targeted," says Butcher.

The examples are numerous. In March, a [raid by Suffolk police](#) on the outskirts of Ipswich recovered 83 dogs that were believed to have been stolen. In April, three people [were arrested](#) after an RSPCA investigation led to the discovery of 27 dogs, including eight puppies, at an address in Essex. In the same month, 21 dogs were [rescued in Gwent](#), with police working to reunite them with their owners. And Nottinghamshire police, which became the first force in the country to appoint a senior officer dedicated to the issue,

[have investigated](#) an attempted theft after which markings visible only under UV light were discovered on a tree in the dog-owner's garden – a suspected method of marking potential targets.



Colin Butcher, UKPD, talks to dog owners about thefts in Partridge Green, West Sussex. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Under the law, there is no specific crime of pet theft; stolen dogs are treated just like other stolen property. “But a dog is part of the family,” May says. “You talk to them; you don’t talk to your wristwatch or your microwave.” Debbie Matthews, CEO of the [Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance](#), which is campaigning for a change in the law, says this makes it hard to get precise numbers. “If it’s part of a house burglary, it will go in that folder; if it’s from a car, it will get hidden in that one. Anything they don’t know where to put goes into a Home Office file called ‘others’. I think it’s file 406 or something – it goes with wheelbarrows, laptops, garden pots, anything ‘other’. The reason for making pet theft a specific crime is so it gets its own folder.”

A specific pet theft crime would enable the courts to give out proper sentencing, says Matthews, to act as a deterrent. “If you’re going to be handed a fine of £250 and you’ve sold that dog for £3,000, it’s worth taking a chance, isn’t it?” she says. There have been [petitions](#); former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith [brought it up in parliament](#); and there’s talk of

banning cash sales for dogs and reintroducing the dog licence to better regulate ownership.

Matthews – who happens to be Bruce Forsyth’s daughter – had two dogs stolen 15 years ago. She got them back, but vividly remembers the episode: it’s why she wants to help other people going through the same thing. “It’s the most dreadful experience. You don’t eat, you don’t sleep, you’re constantly worried. Are they warm, are they dry, are they still together? It never leaves you. You never stop hoping you’re going to get that call to say, ‘We’ve got your dog.’”

Back to Partridge Green. Actually, to the village of Hurstpierpoint, a few miles away. I’ve come with Butcher in his Range Rover to have a look at a house he has been tipped off about, where a car resembling the Nissan Cabstar Botting’s spaniels were seen being bundled into is sometimes parked. He says he wants the occupants to know he’s on to them.

During the drive, he tells me about some of the other cases he has worked on. He says specialist gangs are getting more sophisticated in their methods and planning: as well as researching breeders and kennels, they can geo-reference photos from social media posts. Once they’ve got an address to target, they might knock on the door – offer to jet-wash a drive, perhaps – in order to scope it out, see what’s there. They’ll come back again a week or so later, over the fields this time, at night.

I don't enjoy walks any more; I'm always looking over my shoulder.
Now I'm neurotic about letting her off the lead

And they’ll have a load of equipment with them. Butcher has seen a bag that was left behind by one gang. Inside was an expensive pair of bolt cutters that could get through any padlock, a mishmash of screwdrivers, dry liver treats, dog calming spray (you can get it for taking a dog on a plane), clip-on lights to work in the dark, gaffer tape, cable ties and a makeshift muzzle that traps a tennis ball inside the dog’s mouth. “It’s quite brilliant, really – the dog can breathe because its mouth is open, but it can’t bark, and it’s relatively happy ’cos it’s got a tennis ball in its mouth,” says Butcher. Sometimes, the thieves

cable tie the dogs' legs together and carry them upside down: "Truss them up like handbags, so they can carry three or four each."

After driving past the address in Hurstpierpoint, which Butcher believes belongs to the parents of the Nissan's owner, he parks round the corner. He tells me to stay in the car; two blokes would look threatening. On goes the UKPD jacket.

Fifteen minutes later, he's back. "I'll talk to you as we move out of the area – it's probably not a good idea to hang around," he says. Butcher tells me what happened. The person who opened the door was the suspect's father. "He was very friendly to start with, then I said, 'I've got a picture here of some springer spaniels,' and straight away he was guarded. I said, 'I don't know who it is, but somebody in this area has told me a Nissan Cabstar parks up here occasionally, and that vehicle's been involved in picking up two springer spaniels from Partridge Green.' And he said, 'If you know so much, I can't fucking help you, can I, 'cos you know more than I do.'"

And so on. Butcher says the man and his wife, who was in the background with a toddler, probably their grandchild, now know that the woman whose dogs were taken is a nursing assistant who works on an intensive care ward. And their son will be aware that Butcher knows where his parents live, "so we're making it personal", he says.

Weymouth, Dorset, the following day, and I'm on a chilly morning walk. Honey, Annie and Izzy are, respectively, an alapaha blue blood bulldog, a patterdale and a cocker spaniel. Their owners, Anita Wingad, Sarah Wood and Amanda Hall, are all very aware of the dog-theft crime wave.

It was here, in Radipole Park Gardens, that a man with long hair and a red jacket tried to snatch Izzy from Hall a couple of months ago. "He came up behind me, grabbed the lead, said, 'Give me the dog,'" she tells me. Hall hung on, Izzy barked uncharacteristically, and the man ran off, leaving Hall shaking like a leaf. "I wouldn't say I'm over it," she says. "I don't enjoy walks any more; I'm always looking over my shoulder, and I'm neurotic about letting her off the lead." She now alters her walk every day. Izzy, who was a rescue dog, has regressed and barked at men ever since. But at least

she and Hall are still together. “She’s my life,” she says. “Losing her would have been the absolute end of me. She’s what gets me up in the morning.”



Amanda Hall with her dog Izzy, Anita Wingad with Honey (middle) and Sarah Wood with Annie on Weymouth beach. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Today, Hall, Wood and Wingad are wearing hi-vis jackets, plus bright-yellow lanyards and whistles around their necks. “It’s about a visual presence that acts as a deterrent,” says Wingad, who hands out leaflets to other dog walkers. Theirs is one of about 30 groups in England and Wales. It’s part of a scheme called [DogHorn](#), dreamed up by a semi-retired 67-year-old called Nigel King, whose idea was prompted by the disappearance of his own spaniel, Nora, in what he believes was a theft. “There are three aspects to it: sound, teamwork and visibility,” he says on the phone from his home in Northumberland. “It might make a thief think twice, go, ‘Shit, they are DogHorn people.’”

There’s even a whistle code, based on a shortened version of SOS: short blast, long blast, short blast; dit dar dit. I’m not 100% sure that’s going to catch on; that people will recognise that dit dar dit means, “Help, someone’s stealing my dog!” Even if they were in the navy once and knew morse code, they’d read it as ETE. But anyway, I say, go on, give us a blast!

Wingad does, a bit tentatively, but it's still quite loud. No one comes running to help. But I can see that the combination of that, the official-looking lanyard and the hi-vis might make a dognapper think twice. Wingad demonstrates her own twist on the DogHorn response, doing the internationally recognised action for kneeing her imagined attacker in the groin. Now it's time to go down to the beach to hand out more leaflets.

News from Partridge Green, a couple of days later: Butcher says he went down to the area where the owner of the Nissan lives. The vehicle wasn't there, nor its owner, "AKA dog thief". But he spoke to a woman he thinks is the man's wife. "I said to her, 'Look, I don't know if you're aware that the owner of the dogs spends 12 hours in intensive care every day, saving people's lives.'"

He got a look at the dogs there, none of which were Botting's spaniels Reggie and Ruby, and he left. But half an hour later, his phone rang. The caller didn't identify himself, but Butcher is sure he was his suspect. "He told me I'd threatened his kid, that he didn't appreciate that. I said, 'There were no children on the site.' He said, 'Yeah, you went round to my old man's house. I've got nothing to do with these thefts.' I said, 'Look, I did not go in the house, I did not intimate anyone, you're not getting the right news here. All I want to do is get these dogs back.' He said, 'Nothing to do with me,' and hung up."

The next morning, Butcher got another call – he doesn't know who from, but it sounded like a teenager – shouting: "You got your dogs back, you got your dogs back."



Donna Botting, who is a nursing assistant, at home with Ronnie.
Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Botting also got a call that morning, from a number she didn't recognise, in Gravesend, Kent. "I thought, oh God, that's probably someone I owe money to," she tells me on the phone, and she ignored it. But it rang again. This time she answered: they said it was Meopham veterinary hospital and they had a male spaniel, which they'd scanned for a chip and it had come up with her details. "I didn't know whether to laugh, cry, scream. Honestly, I don't even know how I wrote the name of the vets down, I was shaking so much."

Reggie had turned up abandoned in a field, looking lost. A man walking his own dogs had come across him – Reggie had played with his dogs and then jumped into the back of his Land Rover. Botting says: "That's Reg, he's already been stolen once, and he just jumps in another car!" She didn't have any money and her fuel tank was empty. "I phoned my mum, said, 'Do you fancy a trip to Gravesend, you might have to put the petrol in the tank, but they found Reg.' She said, 'Get your backside round here now.'"

Once they arrived at the vets, they called to say they were outside and Reggie came out, dragging a veterinary nurse behind him. "She almost came home with us," says Botting. "My mum sat in the back with him the whole way back and he kept licking her face."

Back home, Reggie was reunited with Ronnie. They were all over each other, father and son. Botting is ecstatic to have him back, though the joy is tarnished with worry about Ruby, who is still missing.

It's now nearly eight weeks since Ruby was snatched. During that time, more than 50 dogs have been registered as stolen on the DogLost website, including several spaniels, staffies, cockapoos. And Bear, a German shepherd puppy, snatched from outside Tesco in Poole and taken away by a man on a rental bicycle.

Anita Wingad, of the Weymouth DogHorn group and owner of Honey the alapaha blue blood bulldog, knows about that one, it's just up the coast. Her group now has nearly 800 members. The prime minister, meanwhile, [has said he will carry out a "ruthless" crackdown](#) on pet theft, throwing his weight behind a taskforce set up after the surge in dognapping.

Colin Butcher, UKPD – whose [video on how to prevent a theft](#) during a country walk has now had more than 100,000 views – isn't very hopeful that Botting will get Ruby back now. A raid by Surrey police, part of an operation that prevented him from pursuing some of his own inquiries, [recently unearthed 26 suspected stolen dogs](#), but Ruby wasn't among them. Colin suspects that she will have been moved on or sold. He would like to remind the dognappers of the pain they cause. "It's a very, very heartless soul that can turn a blind eye to that," he says.

Pain that perhaps is not just the preserve of a bereft owner. At Donna Botting's house, the two male dogs, Reggie and Ronnie, know there's still something not quite right. Reggie has been lying by the front door, just where Ruby used to hang out. "He can obviously still smell her scent," says Botting. "They keep looking at me, as if to say: where is she?"

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[Cush Jumbo](#)

Interview

Cush Jumbo: ‘He’s doing less screen time but being paid three times more? Er, no!’

[Emma Brockes](#)



Cush Jumbo: ‘I want to be part of what is happening here.’ Photograph: Chantel King/The Guardian. Shirt: [JW Anderson](#)

Cush Jumbo: ‘I want to be part of what is happening here.’ Photograph: Chantel King/The Guardian. Shirt: [JW Anderson](#)

The Good Fight star went from relative obscurity in the UK to primetime in the US. Now she’s coming home on her own terms



[@emmabrockes](#)

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Even virtually, [Cush Jumbo](#)'s energy enters the room before she does, which is at a run, with the force of someone just ejected from a cannon. "I don't like being late, ugh, can you hear me?!" the actor and writer says, peering at the screen, smiling gamely and settling down in a chair. "As usual, my day has been scheduled back to back, no room for manoeuvre, so if anything goes wrong ... I've literally just begged the doorman for his bottle of water out of his lunchbox." Jumbo, who is filming in Manchester for a Netflix show called Stay Close, which she summarises as "glossy, very fast-moving, sometimes doesn't make sense but you don't care", has ducked into a conference room straight from rehearsals, still in loose-fitting leisurewear and manic from work. "Hello!" she says, and exhales.

It is hard to think of a British actor who comes close in range, depth and sheer vitality to Jumbo who, at 35, is at the height of her powers. After training in classical theatre, she moved to the US to work on a series of juggernaut TV shows, before returning to Britain last year on the brink of superstardom. She has played DC Whelan, Brenda Blethyn's detective sidekick in ITV's [Vera](#); Lucca Quinn, the whip-smart lawyer in the CBS legal drama The Good Wife and its follow-up, [The Good Fight](#); and on

stage, Mark Anthony in [Phyllida Lloyd's all-female Julius Caesar](#), a role for which she earned an Olivier nomination. Her latest role, as a grieving mother in the BritBox original drama *The Beast Must Die*, puts her front and centre of an ensemble cast that includes [Jared Harris](#) and *The Serpent's* Billy Howle. The six-part series is an entertaining and slightly cartoony whodunnit to which she brings a leavening intensity. "This was the first script I have ever been offered that had me in tears when I was reading it," she says. "Knocked me off my feet. Things like this don't land on my doorstep every day."



As Lucca Quinn, with Christine Baranski in *The Good Fight*. Photograph: Patrick Harbron/CBS

It is surprising to hear Jumbo say this, given her recent successes. Starring in five seasons of the five-time Emmy-winning [The Good Fight](#) alongside Christine Baranski has made her well-known in the US, but even before that, she had received the kind of critical acclaim in the US that most British actors would die for. In 2015, [Josephine And I](#), her one-woman show about Josephine Baker, opened off-Broadway. The theatre critic Ben Brantley wrote a [love letter to Jumbo in the New York Times](#), culminating in the line, "This British actress radiates that unquantifiable force of hunger, drive and talent usually called star power." Jumbo, who had written the show about the entertainer and activist several years earlier, partly in response to a dearth of

acting roles coming her way, remembers reading it the night it came out. “I was literally like, I can die. If I die, I’m OK, and people will think I was a proper actor and I meant something. It was incredible.” When Baranski saw *Josephine And I*, and mentioned Jumbo to *The Good Fight*’s creators, she was promptly cast in the show and catapulted into the big time in the US, where she stayed for the next five years. Jumbo left the UK as a well-respected but somewhat struggling actor. When she returned, last year, it was to first refusal on the best roles in the land, including the title in *Hamlet* at the Young Vic.

What is so curious about this trajectory is that it is entirely self-authored. Jumbo wrote *Josephine And I* at her mother’s suggestion, at a time when she was feeling so burnt out and demoralised as an actor that she had considered leaving the profession. A few years later, she would write a short play, *The Accordion Shop*, inspired by the London riots of 2011 and performed as part of a National Theatre youth programme, by which time *Josephine And I* was heading for New York, and Jumbo’s acting career was rebooting. It was a turnaround in fortunes that even five years ago couldn’t, in all likelihood, have happened in England. “I didn’t shoot right out of drama school into success,” as she puts it, and for most of her 20s, job offers were thin enough on the ground that she had little choice over the roles she took. “The reality is that actors wish they could choose jobs,” she says. “Most of the time you just get what’s available and hope at some point in the future you’ll be able to choose.”



With Jared Harris in *The Beast Must Die*. Photograph: Gareth Gatrell/Britbox

It wasn't a simple case of there being more opportunities in the US. In Britain, Jumbo says, she faced very particular casting hurdles. She was born and raised in south London, the second of six children of a British mother and Nigerian father, and, after graduating from first the Brit school and then the Central School of Speech and Drama, worked mainly in theatre. She appeared, in short succession, in *Liquid Gold* at the Almeida, *Love's Labour's Lost* at the Globe and *As You Like It* at the Royal Exchange in Manchester. Good reviews always followed – [this newspaper called](#) her appearance as Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* “magnificent” and tipped her as “set to become one of the best actresses of her generation”. But although she logged plenty of TV appearances in her 20s – the inevitable *Casualty* and [Torchwood](#), as well as a recurring role in the excellent BBC comedy [Getting On](#) – her career moved in fits and starts, and never quite seemed to take flight.



Photograph: Chantel King/The Guardian. Top and skirt: [Roksanda](#). Mules: [Wandler](#). Ring: [Alighieri](#)

On one level, this suited Jumbo just fine. She had gone into acting with modest expectations and as long as she could make ends meet, she was happy. “I’ve been poor, I grew up poor, and although in my early years I never made any money, I never went into acting to make money. All I ever wanted was to not have to work as a waitress; to be able to act full-time and not owe anybody money.” Still, as the years went by, the frustrations piled up. This is – or at least was – the difference, she says, between being an actor in Britain and in the US. In America, it used to be the case that she would go to audition for something and shock people, so unaccustomed were Americans to encountering black Britons. “I used to enjoy walking into rooms and people being very confused about this voice coming out of this face,” she says in her strong south London accent. Once the confusion died down, however, her Englishness tended to play in her favour, due to the absolute deafness of American ears to English class distinctions. “In the UK, you go to an audition, you’re just out of drama school, and you open your mouth and people judge you because they know what kind of school you went to. Whereas in the US, you go to an audition, you open your mouth, and all they hear is the Queen. Or Mary Poppins. That’s all they hear! You’re already doing a great job, because they’re like, ‘You’re so posh!’ I’m literally from Lewisham and they have no idea.” Appearing alongside Game

Of Thrones star Rose Leslie, a genuine posh person who grew up in a castle in Scotland, Jumbo says, “It was hilarious because I’d be going wah-wah-wah and she’d be going da-da-da and you could just see everyone was fucking confused; hold on, now they both sound like queens, but different ones!”



As Josephine Baker in *Josephine And I*. Photograph: Charlie Carter

In the last few years, things have improved somewhat for black and working-class actors in both countries, Jumbo says. “The more black [British] actors who work in the US, the more they realise a) black people live in the UK, and not just that one person in *Downton*, and b) there are loads of us.” Daniel Kaluuya’s [recent Oscar win](#) for his role in *Judas And The Black Messiah* has done a lot to foreground black British actors in the US, and if Americans marvel at the discovery that Lucca Quinn is British, “I’m really flattered because it means I’m not fucking up the accent.” In the UK, meanwhile, though “racially sometimes I think we’re a bit ahead [of the US], class-wise, we still struggle. There was always a snobbery towards working-class actors, which has caused a lot of them to change their accent. But things have changed.”

Other aspects of life in the US were strange to Jumbo, particularly after she had her son, Maximilian. She and her husband, Sean Griffin, a tech

developer, had been friends for years before they started dating – “I never thought he fancied me,” she has joked – and when Jumbo’s star started rising in the US, he dropped everything to follow her out there. The couple married in New York in 2014 and four years later their son was born. In one famous episode in *The Good Fight*, Lucca is mistaken for her baby’s nanny by a white woman who calls the police, an experience that, Jumbo [told The Advocate in 2019](#), happened to her in milder form in New York. Realising her error, the woman was mortified, but the point is, Jumbo said at the time, the racial dynamics of New York – where nannies are almost exclusively women of colour – are completely different from those of her home town. “If I was in London in a park, there’s just no way in hell anybody would mistake me for the nanny.”

Jumbo’s own parents raised her in an unconventional household in which her mother, Angela, a nurse who recently came out of retirement to help administer Covid-19 vaccines, was the breadwinner, and her father, Marx, a stay-at-home dad. Even now, she says, when she has a parenting question, she’s straight on the phone to her dad. “My dad is very much an alpha male Nigerian man, but he just had a way with babies,” she says. “If my son’s teeth are bothering him, or if he’s not sleeping or I can’t potty train him, the first thing I do is call my dad.”



In 2019, with parents Marx and Angela, and husband Sean Griffin, receiving an OBE for her services to drama. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

If those early years of Jumbo's career were frustrating, they weren't entirely without good TV roles, chiefly that of DC Bethany Whelan, whom Jumbo played alongside Brenda Blethyn in Vera. She has, she says, been extremely lucky with her "leading ladies" – Julianna Margulies in [The Good Wife](#), Baranski in The Good Fight, Blethyn in Vera and Harriet Walter in the stage production of Julius Caesar. Blethyn, she says, taught her all about how to act for camera, and also not to take any of it too seriously. "She was always the one telling dirty jokes. If you put on a pair of plastic gloves, she'd want us to be a pair of detectives called the Spunk Squad, off to explore how much spunk was on a certain car. We'd be about to do a scene and she'd be like, wait, no, I've got another idea for Spunk Squad!"

Is Christine Baranski as fabulous as one imagines? "Great-aunt Baranski?!" hoots Jumbo. "She's amazing. When I call her a grande dame, I don't mean as in diva, I mean as in always looking after everyone. Christine would order in a truck that served everybody home-cooked Polish food, filling us up with pierogi to make sure we were eating right."

Who's the grandest out of Baranski, Blethyn and Walter? "I don't know. Wouldn't you like to see something with all three of them in it?!" I would. It would be like a reboot of [Nothing Like A Dame](#), that Judi Dench, Maggie Smith, Eileen Atkins, Joan Plowright documentary that was almost too much to bear. "Right? All three are so different, and so lovely. It makes me want to be a grande dame one day."



As DC Bethany Whelan in Vera. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

On the evidence of her current performances, there is a good chance that Jumbo's wish will come true. Part of her skill as an actor lies in her ability to create an inner life for even relatively flatly written characters, something she puts down to her obsessive need to research. If she hadn't been an actor, she says, "I think I'd be a historical archivist or something. I enjoy the detective work of putting together the arc of the character, working out where their emotional peaks are, figuring out if they're acting on a level that's for other people or for themselves." Before taking on a role, she does an enormous amount of multimedia research. "I have a collage cupboard; I work a lot from pictures and music and things I cut out. I find stuff on walks, I make playlists. And I keep it all, physically, so that when I'm in rehearsal and I think, oh, I remember seeing somebody stand like that, it's there. I have mood boards and bits and pieces like a crazy art teacher."

For *The Good Fight*, she dropped in on a group of second-year students at Brooklyn Law school to ask them what it was like to be litigators, although in that particular instance, she says, a background in classical theatre was the more helpful influence. While other cast members grumbled about long court scenes and the memorisation of legal language, Jumbo loved precisely these aspects of the show, which she felt echoed Shakespeare. "That's all Shakespeare does: he's always turning an argument. Even in a soliloquy,

when you're not talking to anybody, you're having to argue a law to yourself and make peace with something or find a resolution." In *The Good Fight*, Lucca Quinn appears in every kind of courtroom, each requiring its own choreography. "So we had criminal, federal, family and bond court. And you have to behave differently, physically and legally, in each, which is what we have our advisers for. In some, you're supposed to address the jury not the judge; in others, you address the judge. Some don't have a jury. Some you can't turn your back on, some you can. Combine that with the language and you're basically in a scene that's fit for Shakespeare, except you're in a pencil skirt and fabulous Gucci jacket."



Photograph: Chantel King/The Guardian. Styling: Melanie Wilkinson, assisted by Peter Bevan. Makeup: Lucy Patchett using Omorovicza skincare and Westman Atelier cosmetics. Jumpsuit: [Adriana Degreas](#). Mules: [Wandler](#). Earrings: [Dinosaur Designs](#)

After shooting four seasons of *The Good Fight*, with a brief appearance in the fifth to explain her character's exit, Jumbo decided to move back to the UK. This was partly for personal reasons. "I wanted my son to grow up in the UK and culturally have that experience – my family's all here, [Sean's] family's all here." Becoming a mother, she says, has made her more ambitious – "And straight-talking. I really love my kid and I'm really glad I had him. But everything costs something, and it's not possible to do it all at

the same time. So if I'm going to give [everything] to a job, which I try to, then it really has to be worth it."

The move back to the UK was partly for artistic reasons, too. Six years after *Josephine And I* opened at the Bush theatre in London, she is returning not only at a different stage of her career, but to a different production landscape. "I wanted to be part of what I think is happening here, which is this massive growth in things being shot and made and written in the UK, but that are going out globally."

There are ways to be positively assertive about what you're worth, and I'm worth more. So if you want me, make me an offer

One of these is *The Beast Must Die*, produced by BritBox and going out in the US on AMC, which launched [Mad Men](#). The production she's filming in Manchester, an adaptation of Harlan Coben's thriller *Stay Close*, is produced by Netflix with ITV. The budgets in the US are bigger, and she has noticed that "the crews are more diverse, especially in terms of women – more female producers and directors, and in technical departments, though that's changing in the UK now, too." Broadly, however, "I feel like I've moved back here and we've caught up," she says.

Even so, UK money is never going to rival a US network TV deal. Jumbo smiles. "UK money is not the same. But I'd also say that I think I've come back with a way more Lucca Quinn frame of mind. I know what I should be paid, now let's see how close to that we can get. And whether I feel like the project is worth me dropping down."

She will drop her price for theatre, of course. This autumn, Jumbo is set to star in the much anticipated and Covid-delayed production of [Hamlet at the Young Vic](#), something she is doing out of an obsessive need to challenge herself (one has, she says, to be "a nutter" to play Hamlet, and that's without the added challenge of a woman playing a man). "Hamlet's questioning the world, so I'm going into it looking at every different kind of man you can lay your hands on. Books and books, to see where I can find what it means to be a man these days, a spectrum from Boris Johnson, to Stormzy, to a guy who wants to walk in heels down Oxford Street, to a sports personality, to

my dad. And maybe Hamlet was just born at the wrong time. He's other, which I like."



As Mark Antony in Julius Caesar. Photograph: Helen Maybanks

It's a labour of love, one that Jumbo hopes may bring young people into the theatre. And a great screen project with no funding might tempt her in similar ways. Where she is not willing to compromise is on parity of pay with male co-stars. "Now is the time when you say, 'What's that? My male colleague is doing a third of the time on screen but is being paid three times more than me? Er, no.' Or, 'I'm helping you creatively and am writing things, I want my credit and I want to be a producer.' You come back [from America] with that frame of mind," she says, "rather than the British mentality of, 'Oh, I'm just so lucky to be here! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!' There are ways to be positively assertive about what you're worth, and I'm worth more. So if you want me, you have to make me an offer."

['There will be orgasms in the aisles!' Cush Jumbo meets Anne-Marie Duff](#)
[Read more](#)

Have her male co-stars helped out by sharing details of their deals with her? "Yeah, my agent makes sure they do. It used to be much more like a war about who was going to win, and now we're more like, can we find a deal

that's good for everyone and be fair? I'm lucky to have an agent who's been behind me when I wasn't earning any money and before it was popular to be a fan of a leading black actress. So he isn't going to quit now we're finally getting what we deserve. At the end of the day, if I don't ask those questions, if I don't make sure I'm getting parity, then how are the girls coming up behind me supposed to get it?"

One suspects Jumbo has always been in a hurry, her energy pitched above everyone else's in the room. But at this stage, she says, she doesn't have time to mess around. "I have to paddle real fast and keep paddling. I'm 36 this year." It feels as if it has taken her a long time to get here – to the point where she is "privileged to be able to have options" – and she is going to seize every opportunity. "I'm obsessed," she says. It's an obsession not just with acting, but with the thrill of doing something new. "I'm that person who's like, oh, I know that we have to have a stunt double, legally." She smiles in acknowledgment of the space this takes up and the years that have gone into earning it. "But let me try."

The Beast Must Die is available on BritBox from 27 May.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/may/15/cush-jumbo-hes-doing-less-screen-time-but-being-paid-three-times-more-or-no>

Rights and freedomBali

‘Have a little empathy’: Bali tires of badly behaved foreign influencers



A tourist enjoys an infinity pool at a resort in Ubud, Bali. The Indonesian island's economy has been devastated by Covid. Photograph: swissmediavision/Getty Images

A tourist enjoys an infinity pool at a resort in Ubud, Bali. The Indonesian island's economy has been devastated by Covid. Photograph: swissmediavision/Getty Images

Tourists threaten the island's economic recovery by ignoring Covid protocols, including refusing to wear masks and even making a porn film

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HUMANITY UNITED

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[Febriana Firdaus](#) in Ubud

Fri 14 May 2021 16.00 EDT

A Russian Instagrammer who launched his motorbike off a dock, crashing into the sea. Two YouTube pranksters who fooled a supermarket guard with drawn-on face masks, violating the island's health rules. A couple allegedly filming porn on a sacred mountain.

Bali has hosted a range of badly behaved influencers during the pandemic. And now it's had enough.

While some countries sent foreign travellers home as Covid began to spread, [Indonesia](#) allowed visitors to remain. Yet, one year on since the start of the pandemic, police say many foreign tourists still show flagrant disregard for the local health protocols.

[US woman who tweeted about dream gay lifestyle in Bali to be deported](#)
[Read more](#)

“Yes, the foreigner brings income for us. But their action will risk the local who works to serve them as well. Can they have a little empathy?” said

Balinese politician and designer Niluh Djelantik, who fears their behaviour is jeopardising Bali's chances of restarting its tourism industry.

Social media influencers – who are drawn to the island's photo-perfect, emerald-green paddy fields, its scenic temples and beaches – have proved a particular problem. “The key for Bali recovery (from the pandemic) is the low number of (Covid-19) cases. But the foreigner who has (online) followers creates content about violating the health protocol, leaving an impression that Bali is not safe,” Niluh said.

Over the past few months, reports of disrespectful, brash stunts, careless partying and even insulting behaviour by social media influencers have angered the public.

Some high profile cases have been deported, including, most recently, Russian influencer Leia Se, whose supermarket mask prank went viral. In a video statement filmed with co-star Josh Paler Lin, a Taiwanese YouTuber, she apologised for the stunt. Josh Paler Lin said he did not set out to be disrespectful, or to encourage rule breaking. “I made this video to entertain people because I'm a content creator and it is my job to entertain people,” he said.



Leia Se have had her passport seized following a prank in which she painted on a face mask in a Bali supermarket. Photograph: YouTube

It isn't just foreign social media stars flouting the rules, but tourists more generally, said Robby Septiadi, chief of police in Badung Regency. "The foreigners have a low level of compliance towards the health protocol regulation compared to the locals. It is very low."

So far this year, about [346 foreign tourists](#) violated the health protocols, while 60 were deported from the island according to [local media](#). Foreigners are charged Rp 1,000,000 (\$70 USD) for not obeying health guidelines, 10 times more than locals, because officials say they are more likely to misbehave and a tougher deterrent is needed. Police have even made foreigners do push ups as punishment.

One foreign photographer was so frustrated by others who ignore mask requirements that they created a sign with a photo montage of tourists spotted without one, and displayed it in Ubud's traditional market. "Many internationals here in Bali do not wear masks. They do so because they have different ideas about masks," the accompanying text reads. "It does not matter what those ideas are. The law in Bali is to wear a mask in public."

‘Shame on all these people’

Balinese writer, Ni Made Purnama Sari, said that such tourist behaviour is a legacy of the Dutch colonial treatment of the island. After the Puputan war in the early 20th century the Dutch promoted it as a commodity only: an exotic island, escaped heaven, and the virgin island. "This is a lasting colonial legacy. They only see Balinese as tools for the tourism industry," she said.

Recent incidents have provoked anger online: "Covid is not a joke at all, shame on these people," wrote one commenter. But some Balinese are reluctant to call out bad behaviour, Ni Made said, because they have been encouraged to welcome visitors: "Balinese are very tolerant to these foreigners rather than domestic visitors."

The image of Bali that is promoted worldwide – a beautiful island with generous people where it is also cheap to live – has exacerbated the situation. A recent report from International Living, featured [by Forbes](#), described Bali as such good value that foreigners could move there and live without working – though, it went on to note that it would cost US\$1,900 a month to live well in most towns.

“They invited those who had power, those from developed countries, to come to the Third World countries to fulfil their dream: a cheap place,” Ni Made said.

The local economy, which relies heavily on tourism, has been devastated by the pandemic. According to Indonesia’s statistics agency, the islands’s economy [slumped by 9.3%](#) in 2020. Many hotels and restaurants are closed. [Balinese are losing jobs, prompting some to return to farming and fishing](#).

Sang Ayu, 38, who works as a villa housekeeper in Tegallalang, said that she makes Rp 1.7m per month (US\$118). “We are grateful for the salary,” said Sang Ayu. The provincial minimum wage is around US\$174.

The Indonesian government is aiming to create “green zones”, where vaccination rates are high, to encourage domestic, and eventually foreign tourism, to the country’s key destinations.

Niluh hopes that, in the meantime, foreigners – including social media influencers – will support local people to keep Bali safe. “To the foreigners who have followers, let’s hold hands together with Balinese. Have a little empathy. You may avoid posting (controversial posts), and (have) concern for the people where you stay,” she said.

Culture

Hamlet! James Bond! Lady Gaga! The cultural events we've waited too long for



Delayed gratification ... (clockwise from top left) Raphael; Lady Gaga; Friends; Guns N' Roses; Glastonbury; Bond; Hamlet; Marina Abramović.

Delayed gratification ... (clockwise from top left) Raphael; Lady Gaga; Friends; Guns N' Roses; Glastonbury; Bond; Hamlet; Marina Abramović.

Since March 2020 the pandemic has taken a big red marker pen to the cultural calendar – here are the longest postponements across the arts

[Graeme Virtue](#)

Sat 15 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Lady Gaga: The Chromatica Ball

Previously July 2020

Now July 2021

Delay equivalent to The ideal period between MOT tests

Gaga's rescinded run of summer 2020 shows should have been the zenith of her [cyber-pop comeback](#). But even after the Chromatica ball-ache of lockdown, there's an exciting "Let's pick up where we left off" energy to her sole UK date being rescheduled to [exactly a year later](#) (30 July).

[The Guide: Staying In – sign up for our home entertainment tips](#)
[Read more](#)

Friends: The Reunion

Previously May 2020

Now May 2021 (US) / tbc (UK)

Equivalent to Stanley Kubrick's painstaking shoot for The Shining

Pivot! Last spring, [all six Friends were poised](#) to film a one-off reunion for the launch of US streamer HBO Max. That plan was torpedoed, but the official Friends Insta account recently confirmed the special is now in the can. Time to #ReleaseTheSchwimmerCut.

Hamlet at the Young Vic

Previously July 2020

Now September 2021

Equivalent to The world record for the longest single human stay in space

Theatre's most famous prevaricator might have enjoyed a prolonged period of stasis but The Good Fight star Cush Jumbo is all about making things happen. Her [delayed debut as the Dane](#) comes at a time when many other starry theatre productions remain TBC.

Raphael at the National Gallery

Previously October 2020

Now Spring 2022

Equivalent to Consecutive weeks that Lewis Capaldi's debut album was in the Top 10

Arguably the most influential Renaissance artist – and definitely the angriest ninja turtle – Raphael achieved a lot in his 37 years. This [pushed-back National Gallery retrospective](#) will examine his entire career, with loans from the Louvre, the Vatican and more.

No Time to Die

Previously April 2020

Now September 2021

Equivalent to Steve McLaren's ill-fated reign as England manager

“You expect me to talk?” No, Mr Bond, we have all learned to manage our expectations. It has been a [punishingly long road](#), but the stop-start scheduling of Daniel Craig's double-O swansong has at least overshadowed its turbulent production history: remember when Danny Boyle was directing?

Glastonbury

Previously June 2020

Now June 2022

Equivalent to The time it took Holst to compose The Planets suite

While other festivals have time-shifted to later in the year, Glasto is cosmically locked to the summer solstice. The logistical efforts required to mount the hippy hoopla meant that a 2021 edition always felt unlikely. So after a [livestreamed mini-bash](#) next week, the fest will return in 2022.

Guns N' Roses' UK shows

Previously May 2020

Now July 2022

Equivalent to The construction of the Eiffel Tower

For years, Axl Rose and GNR were notorious for turning up late and delivering ropey sets. So it seems almost karmic that, just as the revived rockers were rehabilitating their live reputation, lockdown banjaxed their [2020 world tour](#). It's like the wait for Chinese Democracy all over again.

Marina Abramović at the Royal Academy

Previously September 2020

Now 2023

Equivalent to Average lifespan of a hamster

It can be hard to separate art and the artist – particularly if the work involves physical encounters with the public. So it is unsurprising that this major show for the performance artist, featuring live re-performances of her celebrated canon of close encounters, has been [deferred for a good long while](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/may/15/friends-james-bond-no-time-to-die-lady-gaga-guns-n-roses-tour>

2021.05.15 - Opinion

- [From Edward VIII to James Dyson: the yacht that tells a tale of British wealth](#)
- [The Green party can show Labour how to connect with its former heartlands](#)
- [Marriage doesn't work \(just ask Bill and Melinda\) – so let me present some alternatives](#)
- [Once this violence in Israel and Gaza ends, there can be no return to 'normal'](#)

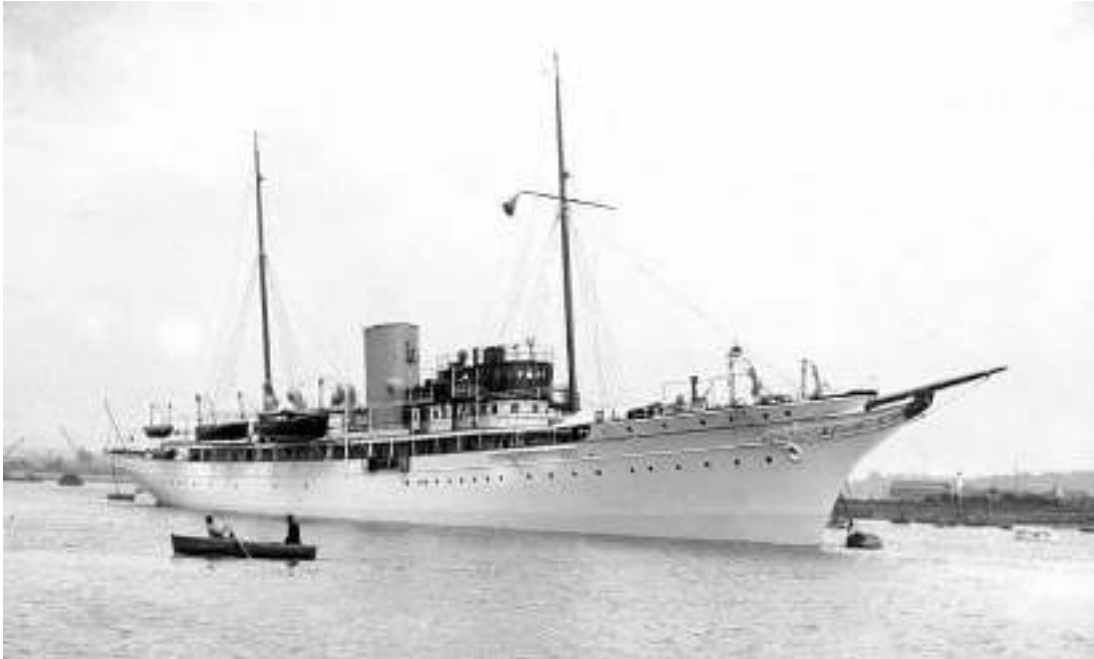
[Opinion](#)**James Dyson**

From Edward VIII to James Dyson: the yacht that tells a tale of British wealth

[Ian Jack](#)



The fortunes of industry and a handful of ultra-rich individuals are woven through the history of the Nahlin



The Nahlin, pictured in 1936. Photograph: Getty Images

The Nahlin, pictured in 1936. Photograph: Getty Images

Sat 15 May 2021 02.00 EDT

In the early years of this century, soon after he began moving production of his bagless vacuum cleaner from Wiltshire [to south-east Asia](#), James Dyson bought a superb yacht. The Nahlin is exemplary in the beauty of its lines and instructive in its history, though how much of this history Dyson understands or relishes is hard to know. Despite spending a fortune (at least £25m) on its restoration, Dyson has never talked publicly about his yacht, no more than he has about his purchase of [Singapore's most expensive flat \(£43m\)](#) and its sale soon after, at a loss. For a time, a kind of omertà prevailed about the vessel's ownership among its team of restorers, though to own and care for such an elegant piece of naval architecture would surely be no shame.

What Dyson certainly knows is that it was on the Nahlin that King Edward VIII and Mrs Wallis Simpson shed any discretion and “came out” as a couple – a relationship reported across the world, though not at the time in Britain – precipitating the crisis that ended with the king's abdication a few months later, in December 1936. “The cruise of the Nahlin” became an inevitable chapter in any telling of the event, though how the king came to be aboard such a mysteriously named vessel tended to be overlooked. In

fact, the name is said to have Native American origins, and reportedly means “fleet of foot” – the yacht’s figurehead wears a chieftain’s headdress – and the king was aboard because the Foreign Office, worried by social unrest in France, had warned against his original plan to rent a villa there.

So instead he rented the Nahlin, to avoid the fuss that a voyage in the royal yacht, the Victoria and Albert, would create and perhaps also because the Nahlin, commissioned only six years earlier, appealed to his appetite for cocktail modernity. Fuss, however, was unavoidable. At Šibenik, the Dalmatian port where the king and Mrs Simpson boarded the yacht, an exuberant crowd of 20,000 turned up and (thanks to reports in the American press) showed as much interest in her as in him; at sea, two Royal Navy destroyers, the Grafton and the Glowworm, accompanied the Nahlin wherever she went – a leisurely August progress down the Adriatic, through the Corinth canal to the Greek islands, and eventually to Istanbul. The “nanny-boats”, as Lady Diana Cooper called them; she and a few other prominent society figures were also aboard, as well as a crew around 60-strong.



The Nahlin, moored off Falmouth, Cornwall, April 2021. Photograph: Hugh Hastings/Getty Images

Of course, the term yacht is misleading. No sails have ever been involved. The Nahlin, like its bland modern equivalents, was a yacht only in the sense that its sole purpose was its owner's pleasure, the owner being in this case a Lady Yule. Launched in 1930 from the Clydebank shipyard of John Brown & Co – builder of celebrated liners such as Cunard's two Queens – it measures 300ft in length and was originally powered by four steam turbines. Characteristically of the steam yacht, of which the Nahlin was among the very last examples, its hull preserves elements of the sailing ship, with a curved clipper bow and a counter stern, each stretching well beyond the waterline. The shape and colour of steam yachts – white hull, cream funnel – made people think of swans. Their costs and months of idleness meant they were an indulgence that only the richest magnates on either side of the Atlantic could afford: JP Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Sir Thomas Lipton.

And Lady Yule? She was thought to be the richest widow in England. How had she come by her money? Jute, was the short answer. A longer one involves a story of British innovation and industrial expansion overseas that Dyson might recognise, beginning in the 1820s when Dundee manufacturers began to look for an alternative to hemp in the making of sacking, rope and sailcloth. Jute was cheap and reliably available from Bengal in British India, but it was tough and brittle and broke easily when it was spun or woven. After years of experiment, it was successfully made pliable by the application of whale oil, of which Dundee as a whaling port had no shortage.

The demand for jute fabric and jute rope boomed, and Dundee enjoyed a near monopoly until the 1870s, when British industrialists began to open jute mills in Bengal itself because, as economic historian Morris D Morris has pointed out, “jute manufacturing was not a complicated process [and] cheap labour was a very great advantage”. Bengal had five jute mills in 1870 and 69 jute mills in 1914, as cheaper Indian-made jute conquered foreign markets previously served by Dundee, and exports of jute cloth from India grew 272 times over the same period; even better was to come with the first world war, when the word “sandbag” must have sounded like a ringing cash register in the inner ear of every Indian jute trader.

The Yule family benefited enormously. Annie Henrietta (Lady) Yule was the daughter of Andrew Yule, the son of a small-town draper in [Scotland](#) who arrived in Kolkata (then Calcutta) in 1863 as an agent representing several

British firms, and whose family eventually owned tea estates, coalmines, cotton and flour mills, railways, and 2,400 square miles of productive land – as well as the jute mills that Andrew Yule’s nephew and successor, Sir David Yule, had taken an especial interest in expanding. Sir David was a shy workaholic who rarely left Kolkata. Aged 42, he married another Yule, his cousin Annie Henrietta. When he died in 1928, soon after ordering his steam yacht, the Times described him as “one of the wealthiest men, if not the wealthiest man, in the country”.

Where did it all go? Lady Yule and her daughter Gladys made a long and expensive world cruise in the Nahlin in the early 1930s. She invested heavily and sometimes unwisely in the British film industry; she opened a stud farm. She had, in the words of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, “strong religious opinions, a sharp tongue, and imperious habits”. Her attempt to force teetotalism on the Nahlin’s crew was probably not a success. At any rate she sold the ship to King Carol II of Romania in 1937, after which the Nahlin disappeared from the map of British interests – missing, presumed dead – until an English yacht broker, Nicholas Edmiston, discovered it moored in the Danube as a floating restaurant in the 1990s. It passed briefly through the ownership of another Brexit-supporting tycoon, Sir Anthony Bamford, before Dyson bought it in 2006.

This week, thanks to the wonder of digital ship location, I traced the yacht’s present whereabouts to the Blohm+Voss shipyard in Hamburg; it had reached there from the Caribbean via Gibraltar and Falmouth. Blohm+Voss spent millions of Dyson’s money when the yacht was first restored and re-engined, and it may be there now for its annual overhaul. The shipyard is old and distinguished, and still fills the harbour with the sounds of building and repair work. They even build luxury yachts there; the clients include Roman Abramovich and Vladimir Putin.

Nothing remains of the Nahlin’s birthplace at Clydebank, apart from a large crane that stands useless at the river’s edge. Ships, like bagless vacuum cleaners and jute, are made elsewhere.

- Ian Jack is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[OpinionGreen party.](#)

The Green party can show Labour how to connect with its former heartlands

[Lynsey Hanley](#)

Rather than campaigning on the climate crisis, the party has won people's support by focusing on their local environments



‘You don’t get Green candidates sweeping into towns every few years promising to keep factories open.’ Yassin Mohamud (left), one of the Green party’s new councillors in Bristol, with a supporter. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

‘You don’t get Green candidates sweeping into towns every few years promising to keep factories open.’ Yassin Mohamud (left), one of the Green party’s new councillors in Bristol, with a supporter. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

Sat 15 May 2021 04.00 EDT

In the week before the Hartlepool byelection, a still loyal Labour voter gave a bleak assessment of her hometown to a [reporter from the Financial Times](#). “We are at the arse-end of the world, just a sprawling housing estate. We don’t really make anything any more.”

The floppy union jack hanging outside Labour’s Hartlepool HQ at the insistence of Keir Starmer’s London-based team turned out to confirm, rather than refute, that verdict. In the absence of making things, Labour tried to make meaning through the display of empty symbols and [lost, catastrophically](#). But there’s another way to create something meaningful: by building relationships. This is where, away from the byelection media frenzy, the Green party excelled in some of last week’s other elections for [local councils in England](#).

You don’t get Green candidates sweeping into towns every few years promising to keep factories open and restore lost trades. What they do ask is how they can help to make the place you live in better. In Birkenhead, Wirral, where shipbuilding employed 16,000 in the 1950s, and whose last remaining shipyard, Cammell Laird, has just announced more than 140 redundancies, the [Greens won three seats](#) that had predominantly been Labour.

Though Birkenhead stayed loyal to Labour in 2019, the area may seem ripe to go the same way as former Labour heartland seats captured by the [Conservatives](#) in the last general election. It is largely working class and ex-industrial, with an older, whiter population than the national average. But Wirral’s new councillors, Harry Gorman, Emily Gleaves and Jason Peter Walsh, won their seats on a massive green-ward, not right-ward, swing from Labour.

The Greens are changing tack at a council level, seeking to campaign less on the wider issue of climate emergency and instead focusing heavily on people’s local environments and day-to-day needs around housing, transport and community spaces. In the past 10 years, the party has targeted and won council seats in poorer areas, often on peripheral estates where the epithet “left behind” can easily be replaced by “segregated by class”.

Chelmsley Wood, the large outer Birmingham estate where I grew up and went to school, went from having one BNP and two Labour members on Solihull council in 2006 to three Green councillors in less than a decade. The election of a BNP councillor on a very low turnout back then should have been the cause of great angst for its remaining Labour representatives, says Chris Williams, a former Solihull councillor who has just become the Green party's national head of elections.

"It's like with Hartlepool," he told me this week. "You thought, would it be the piercing pain that forced [Labour to] change?" The Greens in Solihull, rather than wait for [Labour](#) to jump into action against the BNP after 2006, started door-knocking intensively, asking people what they needed help with and how they would like to see the estate improve.

In a borough cleaved sharply by class and income, housing quickly became central to their efforts. About 60% of social housing tenants in Solihull live in the north of the borough, with a high proportion of the remainder either right-to-buy leaseholders or people privately renting ex-council homes. Not only was the BNP councillor ejected after one term, the Greens now hold nearly all the council seats in north [Solihull](#): having gained one seat last week, it is the second largest party [on the council](#) behind the Tories. Labour, meanwhile, languishes in fourth place with just two seats.

"The feeling on the ground was that over the past two or three decades, people were having things done to them," says Williams. "They kept being told [by Labour]: 'We know what's good for you,' rather than listening and engaging. The whole 'take back control' slogan of the leave campaign was exactly what people wanted to hear." Indeed: 72.4% of voters in Williams's Chelmsley Wood ward voted to leave the EU in 2016.

While lack of affordable housing is by far the most pressing problem for constituents, other salient issues include bus routes – 43% of people in the Chelmsley Wood ward have no access to a car, compared to 6% in Blythe, on the richer side of Solihull – traffic congestion, noise and air pollution from off-road bikes, fly-tipping and the protection of green spaces.

At the risk of stating the obvious, all of these are local issues with a much wider environmental, economic and social resonance. The cost of leaving

them unaddressed, or batted away as if the environment is something you have done to you rather than live in and with, is the pollution of democracy itself.

By 2010, Chelmsley Wood had voted out the BNP. But the question remains: had the Solihull Greens not bothered to campaign on the estate, would the BNP's win have been followed by Ukip and then – once unthinkable – the Tories?

The BNP made use of revanchist and resentful emotions in the mid-2000s when it identified that cynicism, for a small but growing group of people, was a vote-winner. The Tories, more recently, have given a gloss of respectability to that formula, in a way only they can manage. Give Starmer a union flag and he looks like a parody. Give Priti Patel one and she seems to some like a defender of the realm. To imagine Labour can win that game is somewhat less than forensically lawyerly.

My conversations with new and established Green councillors in working-class areas confirms the party's experience in Chelmsley Wood: people's faith in politics, and therefore democracy, is revived first by granular local representation and clear signs that their needs are being met.

Councillors' activities are precisely where local issues and wider political themes intersect, says Williams: "People are very proud of where they live and if someone is really trying hard to make it into a special place then people like that and will reward you with their vote."

[What Bristol's Green surge means for progressive politics in the city | Matty Edwards](#)
[Read more](#)

Julien Pritchard, another Green councillor whose ward includes the long-neglected Druids Heath estate on south Birmingham's periphery, reiterated this. Representation is "about listening and being visible, contactable, present and supportive, showing you care and not taking people for granted. It's not credible or realistic to promise to solve every last problem, but you need to be speaking up and standing up for what the community is already doing."

For a brief period under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership Labour established the Community Organising Unit to try to re-embed Labour's everyday presence in places where its historic electoral grip was faltering. That it was disbanded almost as soon as Starmer became leader suggests that the right flank of the party has already given up.

This is the growing Green party's lesson. The floppy flag in Hartlepool, planted there as if it was on the moon, should be more than a symbol of failure for Labour. It should be a sign that you can't hope to represent places without knowing the people who live in them.

- Lynsey Hanley is the author of [Estates: An Intimate History](#), and [Respectable: Crossing the Class Divide](#)

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[Hadley Freeman's Weekend column](#)Marriage

Marriage doesn't work (just ask Bill and Melinda) – so let me present some alternatives

[Hadley Freeman](#)



I find the idea of being legally bound to my partner unacceptably claustrophobic



Bill and Melinda Gates: ‘There’s only one conclusion to draw from this story: marriage doesn’t work.’ Photograph: Getty Images

Bill and Melinda Gates: ‘There’s only one conclusion to draw from this story: marriage doesn’t work.’ Photograph: Getty Images

Sat 15 May 2021 04.00 EDT

A lot has been said about [the end of Bill and Melinda Gates’ marriage](#), mainly by people who have as much insider intelligence on it as I do, which is to say, none at all. But there really is only one conclusion to draw from this story: marriage doesn’t work.

Look, I’m not saying that Bill Gates is the earthly representation of love incarnate. But if [two people who have more homes than most people have shoes, own more farmland than any other private landowner in the US and have a private jet](#) (no fighting about whose fault it is you missed the flight when you own the plane!) can’t make it, who can? Of course, there’s more to a successful marriage than money, such as shared experiences. Well, Bill and Melinda [vaccinated the world](#). That seems like something you might bond over, right? “Hey honey, remember that time we eradicated polio?” That’s got to be better than reminiscing about the last holiday you took before the kids were born, like the rest of us do. Didn’t that give them a warm and fuzzy feeling inside? The answer, as we all now know, was no.

According to court documents, the Gates' marriage is [“irretrievably broken”](#), and broken it must be, if they couldn't even bear the idea of staying married but just living in different houses. Did I mention they have plenty to choose from? Hell, the two of them could be in the same house and literally never see each other: the dining room in their Seattle home is 1,000 sq ft, which is bigger than any flat I ever lived in. But no, they're insisting on a hyper-expensive divorce, and I don't blame them. I find the idea of being legally bound to my partner unacceptably claustrophobic, too. Unlike Bill and Melinda, though, I've always felt that way, and that's the only difference between us. Well, that and the billions.

Marriage was invented back when humans were lucky to make it to age 20 without being sacrificed to the Sun God. People were never meant to live together for as long as we do now. Sure, there are the occasional couples who happily go the distance: [Mel Brooks](#) and [Anne Bancroft](#), [Paul Newman](#) and Joanne Woodward. But pretty much every couple who looked perfect to me eventually split up: [Helena Bonham Carter and Tim Burton](#); [Johnny Depp](#) and [Vanessa Paradis](#); [Amy Poehler](#) and [Will Arnett](#). Surely all of us have had the experience where you meet up with a friend – the friend whose 20-year marriage was always the rebuttal to your cynicism about the institution, the friend whose face still lights up when their spouse comes in the room – and they confess to you that they're having an affair/exploring their sexuality/joining a commune/all of the above. Marriage, in its current incarnation, doesn't work, and who better than me – someone who has been happily not married for ever – to come up with the alternatives?

1 Set legal time limits

If marriages lasted, at most, seven years, then couples would enjoy the time they have together more. Couples who aren't that happy could probably tolerate it enough to get to the time limit without activating the nuclear divorce option, and those who just can't get enough of each other can simply sign up for another seven years. Everybody wins (except divorce lawyers).

2 Try a ‘onecule’

People are very into [polycules](#) these days: groups of people who live together and shag each other. This, I'm told by people much cooler than me, is clearly the way humans should live, instead of dullsville monogamy. Maybe, but only if you think the solution to struggling with one baby is to

have triplets. Instead, I propose a onecule, where people can live on their own and be seen as extremely cool for doing so.

[A rich New York playboy with a famous surname – what if JFK Jr had lived? | Hadley Freeman](#)

[Read more](#)

3 Join a cult

Cults seem as though they should be a bonding experience for a couple – like joining a book club together, only more time-consuming – but they generally turn out to have the opposite effect. This is because cults invariably turn out to be about sex; specifically, the cult leader having sex with whoever he likes. But if couples could join a cult that wasn't about sex but free childcare, their marriage would last for ever.

4 Embrace the new rule of six

Make like Henry VIII and get married six times. It worked for him (eventually).

5 Just don't do it

My partner and I have been together for a decade and we are not married, which means we will never divorce. Every time he goes out to the shop, I have no way of knowing if he'll ever come back, because he's not on the marriage leash. He probably will – we have three kids – but maybe he won't. It's exciting! Keeps things spicy. And that's the real secret to longevity.

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[OpinionIsrael](#)

Once this violence in Israel and Gaza ends, there can be no return to ‘normal’

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The cycle of bloodshed will repeat, so long as the status quo remains comfortable for everyone except ordinary Palestinians



‘Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, Hamas rocket attacks on Israel: it seems to play out the same way, again and again.’ The aftermath of an Israeli airstrike, Gaza Strip, 14 May. Photograph: Mahmud Hams/AFP/Getty Images

‘Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, Hamas rocket attacks on Israel: it seems to play out the same way, again and again.’ The aftermath of an Israeli airstrike, Gaza Strip, 14 May. Photograph: Mahmud Hams/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 14 May 2021 12.07 EDT

If Groundhog Day were a horror movie, it would look like this. The [deadly violence](#) shaking the Middle East – Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, Hamas rocket attacks on Israel – seems to play out the same way, again and again, as if on some macabre repeat cycle. We saw it [in 2009](#) and we saw it again [in 2014](#). Each element is familiar: the lopsided death toll, Palestinian deaths outnumbering Israeli ones; the pictures of flattened buildings; the tears of the bereaved. And outside the region, the same armies of keyboard warriors, each parroting the talking points of their side, insistent that only their own pain counts, blind to the losses of the other.

[The violence that began at Jerusalem’s ancient holy sites is driven by a distinctly modern zeal](#) | [Yair Wallach](#)

[Read more](#)

It usually goes like this. The violence escalates, Israel moving from airstrikes to artillery fire to some kind of [action on the ground](#). (Israel seems to be shifting through the gears faster this time.) The number of dead rises until, eventually, there is a ceasefire, brokered via the US and Egypt. Quiet returns, Hamas satisfied that it has asserted itself once more as the lead agent of Palestinian resistance, Israel content that it has “mown the lawn”, cutting back Hamas’s military capacity. Things go back to normal – until the next time.

That pattern is awful. The eruption of violence most obviously, given the agony and destruction it causes every time, but also the reversion to the status quo: that too is terrible, because it simply allows the wound of this conflict to fester until it reopens again, more bloodily than before.

If you’re looking for evidence that the pattern might be different this time, there is a sign, but it is far from encouraging. If anything, it suggests this current episode might be even worse. That’s because the war between Israelis and Palestinians has found a new front, not in the occupied territories, but inside Israel itself. This is what sets 2021 apart from 2014 or 2009: intercommunal violence in Israel’s mixed cities, pitting Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel against each other on streets where they have lived side by side for decades. That violence is disturbing because it is intimate, neighbour against neighbour. It is the [attempted lynching](#) of an Arab man in Bat Yam, dragged out of a car to be beaten and kicked; it is the torching of at least [five synagogues](#) in Lod.

Those scenes have shocked many Jewish Israelis who have long told themselves that their Arab fellow citizens are not like other Palestinians, that they do not have the same deep sense of national identity, that their prime goal is to enjoy economic parity with the 80% of Israelis who are Jewish. The current bloodshed shatters that consoling delusion.

But it should not come as a surprise. For one thing, as the longtime analyst and sometime negotiator Hussein Agha observes, it is increasingly falling to the Arabs of Israel – “the Palestinians of 1948” as he calls them – to “carry the banner of traditional Palestinian nationalism”. In his view, the lid has been kept on the West Bank by the Palestinian Authority; Gazans cannot move without running “into the wall of Hamas and Islamic Jihad”, and the

Palestinian diaspora in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon are too busy just getting by. That leaves the Arabs inside Israel.

Besides, how exactly did Jewish Israelis expect Arab citizens, most of them Muslim, to react to the incendiary moves in Jerusalem and its holy sites that provoked this latest crisis? What did they think would happen, given the passage in 2018 of Benjamin Netanyahu's "[nation state law](#)", which spelled out that only Jews had the right to self-determination in Israel, and which stripped Arabic of its official status?

And yet the pull to revert to the status quo will be powerful. You can see it in Joe Biden's transparent desire to say the [bare minimum](#) and return to the rest of his agenda. Watch [The Human Factor](#), a riveting new documentary about past US attempts to broker a Palestinian-Israeli peace deal, and it's obvious why Biden would want to [steer clear](#): it's a black hole that sucks in colossal amounts of energy, all for nothing.

Agha suggests the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah is similarly "addicted" to the status quo. They too have concluded that no resolution of the conflict is possible; and so, for now, the current setup suits just fine, allowing them "to operate as a group with privileges", giving them status in the eyes of the UN, EU and US.

The cyclical pattern certainly works for Netanyahu. Look how this week has [played out for him](#). Only days ago, he was on the verge of losing power to an opposition coalition sustained among others by two Arab parties. It would have been a first, a threshold moment in the integration of Palestinian citizens into Israeli life. But once the Hamas rockets started falling on Israeli cities, that prospect looked dead. No one needs to say out loud that they do not regard Arabs as legitimate partners in government; they can simply argue that a national crisis is no time for a change in leadership. Not for the first time, Hamas has done Netanyahu a favour.

But it is not only Israel's leaders who have grown used to the status quo. Israelis themselves have learned to live with these periodic outbursts of violence, even the terror of rockets falling from the sky, as the price they pay for long spells of quiet when they can put the conflict out of their minds. They've got good at it, [living in a bu'ah](#), a Tel Aviv bubble in which they are

the hi-tech, startup nation, leading the world in vaccine rollouts one moment, partying on the beach the next.

Inside the bubble, it's easy to forget the West Bank, with its two legal systems – one for Jews, another for Palestinians. It's easy to forget Gaza, with its [14 years of suffocation](#) by closure and joint Israeli-Egyptian blockade, or the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of [Sheikh Jarrah](#), where Jews can reclaim property owned before 1948 but Palestinians are denied that same right. It's easy to forget a 54-year occupation.

The only people who cannot forget are those who live with it every day, those for whom the status quo is unbearable: namely, ordinary Palestinians. If the roles were reversed, Israeli Jews would not be able to bear it either. It's why Israel's former prime minister Ehud Barak spoke a profound truth when he said that, had he been born a Palestinian, he did not doubt he would have [become a fighter](#).

I desperately want the current violence to end. I crave word of a ceasefire. But I cannot hope that things go back to normal. Because normal is what got us here – and what keeps bringing us back, again and again.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
- The Guardian at 200: Jonathan Freedland will be in conversation with Gordon Brown as part of our [digital festival](#) on Wednesday 9 June. [Book tickets here](#)

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2021.05.15 - Around the world

- [Marjorie Taylor Greene AOC calls Republican 'deeply unwell' after 2019 video surfaces](#)
- [China Tornadoes kill 10 and injure hundreds](#)
- ['I was blown away' Divers haul 200lb of trash from Lake Tahoe in a day](#)
- [Mars China lands unmanned spacecraft on red planet for first time](#)
- [Australia Dingo fence to be built on Fraser Island after attacks on children](#)

US Congress

AOC says Marjorie Taylor Greene is 'deeply unwell' after 2019 video surfaces

The progressive representative says the Republican extremist's behavior has 'raised concerns' among Democrats



A video showing Marjorie Taylor Greene harassing Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's staff at her congressional office in 2019 was released by CNN. Photograph: Jacquelyn Martin/AP

A video showing Marjorie Taylor Greene harassing Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's staff at her congressional office in 2019 was released by CNN. Photograph: Jacquelyn Martin/AP

[Adam Gabbatt](#)

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 15.47 EDT

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has said the Republican extremist Marjorie Taylor Greene has a “fixation” on progressive members of Congress, and warned that Greene’s behavior has “raised concerns” among Democrats.

Greene, a Trump loyalist and a [promoter of the QAnon conspiracy theory](#), was elected to the House in 2020, and has spent her first months in office harassing Ocasio-Cortez and other progressive Democrats.

Ocasio-Cortez’s warning came after [CNN unearthed a video](#) showing her staff being harassed by Greene, then a private citizen, in 2019. The footage shows Greene, accompanied by a man who would go on to take part in the Capitol riot in January this year, shouting through the letterbox of Ocasio-Cortez’s congressional office.

“You need to stop being a baby and stop locking your door and come out and face the American citizens that you serve,” Greene says. “If you want to be a big girl, you need to get rid of your diaper and come out and be able to talk to the American citizens. Instead of having to use a flap, a little flap. Sad.”

[Ocasio-Cortez says Biden exceeded progressives’ expectations](#)
[Read more](#)

The video emerged two days [after Greene confronted Ocasio-Cortez](#) outside the House chamber. Greene shouted at the New York congresswoman and accused her of supporting terrorists.

Ocasio-Cortez [told CNN](#): “This is a woman that’s deeply unwell. And clearly needs help. And her kind of fixation has lasted for several years now. At this point I think the depth has raised concerns for other members as well.”

She added: “I think that this is an assessment that needs to be made by the proper professional.”

Ocasio-Cortez, along with fellow progressives Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley, have been regular targets for rightwing extremists including Greene. In September, when Greene was running for Congress,

she [posted a Facebook photo](#) of herself holding a gun alongside images of Ocasio-Cortez, Omar and Tlaib.

“We need strong conservative Christians to go on the offense against these socialists who want to rip our country apart,” the caption read.

In her 2019 video, which [CNN posted online](#), Greene announces: “We’re going to go see, we’re going to visit, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.”

She adds: “Crazy eyes. Crazy eyes. Nutty.”

Ocasio-Cortez referenced the video in a tweet, pointing out double standards between the behavior of some [Republicans](#) and that of Democrats.

“And now it’s revealed that this person [Greene] showed up to members of Congress’ doors with folks from the mob who infiltrated the Capitol, beat Capitol police and strung up nooses in front of the House,” Ocasio-Cortez said.

“If the shoe were on the other foot, the GOP would be calling for my expulsion.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/14/aoc-marjorie-taylor-greene-congress-republican-democrats>

[China](#)

China tornadoes kill 10, injure hundreds

State media says at least six people died in the inland city of Wuhan, where Covid-19 first emerged in late 2019



Debris hang on a tree after a tornado ripped through Caidian district of Wuhan, Hubei province, China. Photograph: Reuters

Debris hang on a tree after a tornado ripped through Caidian district of Wuhan, Hubei province, China. Photograph: Reuters

Associated Press

Sat 15 May 2021 01.27 EDT

Back-to-back tornadoes killed at least 10 people in central and eastern [China](#) and left more than 300 others injured, officials and state media have reported.

Six people died in the inland city of [Wuhan](#) and four others in the town of Shengze, about 600km (370 miles) east, in Jiangsu province, local government statements said.

A tornado first struck Shengze about 7 pm on Friday, toppling factory buildings and damaging electricity facilities, the official Xinhua news agency said. The Suzhou city government, which oversees the town, said in a social media post that four people had died and 149 others had minor injuries. Shengze is near Shanghai on China's east coast.



Damaged vehicles and debris are pictured after a tornado hit an economic zone in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province on 15 May. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

A tornado then hit Wuhan at about 8.40pm with winds of 86km an hour (53 mph), destroying more than two dozen homes and triggering a power outage affecting 26,600 households, Xinhua reported. The Wuhan government said six people had died and 218 were injured.

Xinhua said that 27 homes collapsed in Wuhan, and another 130 were damaged. Construction site sheds and two cranes were also damaged, while downed power lines knocked out electricity, the news agency reported.

Photos showed a swarm of rescuers searching through building debris in Wuhan after midnight Friday and workers clearing metallic debris at a factory in Shengze in the morning.

Covid-19 first emerged [in Wuhan in late 2019](#).

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[California](#)

‘I was blown away’: divers haul 200lb of trash from Lake Tahoe in a day

Scuba team launches six-month effort that has already turned up fishing rods, tires and cans

01:19

Divers remove 200lb of trash from Lake Tahoe in one day – video

Associated Press

Sat 15 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Scuba divers removed about 200lb of garbage from California’s Lake Tahoe on Friday, as part of a six-month effort to rid the popular lake of fishing rods, tires, aluminum cans, beer bottles and other trash accumulating underwater.

The team plans to look for trash along the entire 72 miles (115 km) of shoreline in an endeavor that could be the largest trash cleanup in the lake’s history, said Colin West, a diver and film-maker who founded Clean Up the Lake, the non-profit spearheading the project.

“We are still learning not to be so wasteful. But unfortunately, as a species we still are, and there are a lot of things down there,” West said after completing the first dive.

The team collected about 200lb (90kg) of garbage during their first session and found 20 large or heavy items, including buckets filled with cement and car bumpers, which will have to be retrieved later by a boat with a crane, he said.

[‘Why aren't they home?': Lake Tahoe struggles to keep winter vacationers at bay.](#)

[Read more](#)

They plan to dive three days a week down to depths of 25ft (7 meters). The clean-up effort will cost \$250,000, which the non-profit has collected through grants, and will last through November.

West started doing beach cleanups along the lake after visiting Belize and seeing beaches there littered with trash. But in 2018, after a diver friend told him he and others had collected 600lb (272kg) of garbage from the waters on Tahoe's eastern shore, he decided to focus on the trash in the water.

"I was blown away, and we started researching and going underneath the surface and we kept pulling up trash and more trash," said West, who lives in Stateline, Nevada.

In a survey dive on September 2019, his team removed more than 300lb (136kg) of debris from Lake Tahoe's eastern shore and planned to launch a cleanup along the whole shoreline last year. The pandemic delayed those plans.

But the group of volunteers, which also includes up to 10 divers as well as support crew on kayaks, boats and jet skis, continued diving and cleaning both Lake Tahoe and nearby Donner Lake. By the end of the last summer, they had collected more than four tons of trash from both lakes.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/14/lake-tahoe-cleanup-trash-scuba-divers>

[Space](#)

China lands unmanned spacecraft on Mars for first time

State-run media says landing ‘spectacularly conquered’ a new milestone; it joins US Perseverance rover which landed in February



An image of Mars taken by China's Tianwen-1 unmanned probe in March.
Photograph: CNSA/Reuters

An image of Mars taken by China's Tianwen-1 unmanned probe in March.
Photograph: CNSA/Reuters

Guardian staff and agencies

Fri 14 May 2021 21.10 EDT

An unmanned Chinese spacecraft has successfully landed on the surface of Mars, Chinese state news agency Xinhua has reported, making [China](#) the second space-faring nation after the US to land on the red planet.

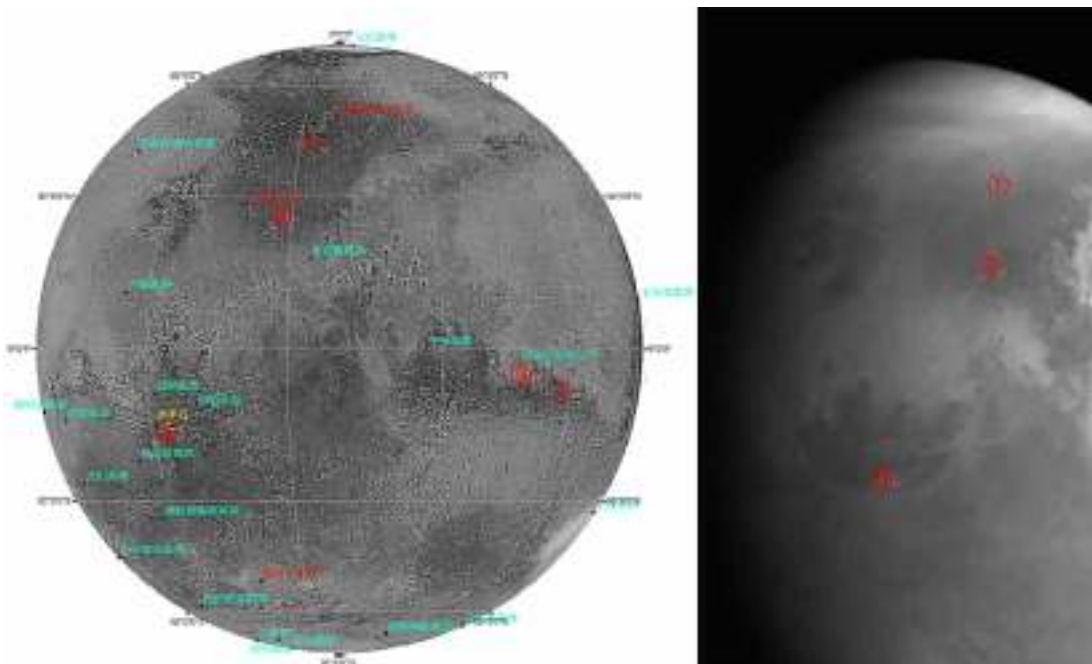
The official [Xinhua news agency said](#) the lander had touched down on Saturday, citing the China National Space Administration.

[Tianwen1 probe sends back its first picture of Mars](#)

[Read more](#)

China's Tianwen-1 probe, consisting of an orbiter, a lander and a rover, was launched from southern China's island province of Hainan in July, around the [same time as a US mission](#).

[It sent back its first picture of Mars](#) in February. A photo released by the China National Space Administration showed geological features including the Schiaparelli crater and the Valles Marineris, a vast stretch of canyons on the Martian surface.



China National Space Administration (CNSA) photo from its Mars probe, Tianwen-1, taken in February. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

The state-run [Global Times newspaper said](#) Tianwen-1 had “spectacularly conquered a new major milestone” with the landing.

The lander carrying the rover, Zhurong, completed the treacherous descent through the Martian atmosphere using a parachute to navigate the “seven

minutes of terror” as it is known, aiming for a vast northern lava plain known as the Utopia Planitia.

Its arrival makes China the first country to carry out an orbiting, landing and roving operation during its first mission to [Mars](#) – a feat unmatched by the only other two nations to reach the red planet, the US and Russia.

Zhurong, named after a Chinese mythical fire god, arrived a few months behind America’s latest probe to Mars – Perseverance – as the show of technological might between the two superpowers played out beyond the bounds of Earth.



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, members at the Beijing Aerospace Control Center celebrate after China’s Tianwen-1 probe successfully landing on Mars. Photograph: Jin Liwang/AP

Six-wheeled, solar-powered and roughly 240kg, the Chinese rover is on a quest to collect and analyse rock samples from Mars’ surface.

It is expected to spend around three months there.

The launch of China’s Tianwen-1 last July marked a major milestone in China’s space programme.

The spacecraft entered Mars' orbit in February and after days of silence state media announced it had reached the "crucial touchdown stage" on Friday.

The complicated landing process has been called the "seven minutes of terror" because it happens faster than radio signals can reach Earth from Mars, meaning communications are limited.

Several US, Russian and European attempts to land rovers on Mars have failed in the past, most recently in 2016 with the [crash-landing of the Schiaparelli](#) joint Russian-European spacecraft.

The latest successful arrival came in February, when US space agency Nasa [landed its rover Perseverance](#), which has since been exploring the planet.

[China launches first module of new space station](#)
[Read more](#)

The US rover launched a small robotic helicopter on Mars which was the first ever powered flight on another planet.

The country has come a long way in its race to catch up with the US and Russia, whose astronauts and cosmonauts have decades of experience in space exploration.

China successfully launched the first module of its new space station last month with hopes of having it crewed by 2022 and eventually sending humans to the moon.

Last week a segment of the Chinese Long March 5B rocket [disintegrated over the Indian Ocean](#) in an uncontrolled landing back to Earth.

That drew criticism from the US and other nations for a breach of etiquette governing the return of space debris to Earth, with officials saying the remnants had the potential to endanger life and property.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

K'gari/Fraser Island

Dingo fence to be built on Fraser Island after attacks on children

The Queensland government will spend \$2m on a fence around Orchid Beach to protect visitors from the native dingo population



The Queensland government will consult with K'gari traditional owners, the Butchulla people, on the fence design after recent dingo attacks. Photograph: Adam Benko/Getty Images/iStockphoto

The Queensland government will consult with K'gari traditional owners, the Butchulla people, on the fence design after recent dingo attacks. Photograph: Adam Benko/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Australian Associated Press
Sat 15 May 2021 00.10 EDT

A new fence is to be built around a township on Queensland's Fraser Island after several dingo attacks on children.

The state government will spend \$2m on the fence around Orchid Beach on the north-east of Fraser Island, which is also known as K'gari.

A four-year-old boy was bitten on the leg there earlier this month and a [toddler was mauled](#) in April.

[Fighting for Fraser Island: how tourism and climate change put an ancient environment at risk](#)

[Read more](#)

In February, a nine-year-old boy was approached by a dingo at Orchid Beach before the child's father scared the animal off.

Queensland's environment minister, Meaghan Scanlon, said close to 7km of fencing would be installed around the township after the local MP raised concerns.

"Fencing will protect visitors, Orchid Beach locals and K'gari's native dingo population, who our rangers believe no longer show apprehension when approaching humans because they've either been deliberately fed or eaten food scraps," she said in a statement on Saturday.

The government will consult with representatives of traditional owners, the Butchulla people, on the fence design and there will be a tender process.

Fences have already been set up around the towns of Eurong, Happy Valley and Kingfisher Bay Resort, and at 24 campgrounds.

People who feed or intentionally disturb the dingoes face fines of up to \$10,000, in a bid to prevent the animals being encouraged to associate with humans.

In April 2019, a 14-month-old boy was dragged by his head from his family's camper trailer, leaving him with a fractured skull and puncture wounds.

In 2001, two dingoes stalked and killed a nine-year-old boy when he tripped and fell near an island campsite. His brother was also mauled.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/15/dingo-fence-to-be-built-on-fraser-island-after-attacks-on-children>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Headlines friday 14 may 2021

- [Gaza Strip Israel air and ground forces hit targets as death toll climbs](#)
- [Live Israel launches fresh Gaza attacks amid rocket fire](#)
- ['More than a reaction to rockets' Israel violence spreads](#)
- [Analysis Violence and mayhem offer Netanyahu refuge](#)

Gaza

Israeli air and ground forces hit targets in Gaza Strip as death toll climbs

Military says no troops currently operating inside territory as number of casualties continues to grow



An explosion lights the sky after an airstrike in the northern Gaza Strip, as the conflict escalates following ground attack by Israel Defense Forces troops. Photograph: Mohammed Abed/AFP/Getty Images

An explosion lights the sky after an airstrike in the northern Gaza Strip, as the conflict escalates following ground attack by Israel Defense Forces troops. Photograph: Mohammed Abed/AFP/Getty Images

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem, [Harriet Sherwood](#) and agencies

Fri 14 May 2021 07.42 EDT

Israeli ground and air forces have attacked targets in Gaza, forcing residents to flee their homes, in a significant escalation in the worst bout of fighting

for seven years.

Heavy artillery fire was aimed at what the Israeli military said was a large network of militant tunnels. The intense overnight bombardment came amid speculation that Israeli troops were preparing to enter [Gaza](#) on the ground.

Red flames illuminated the skies above Gaza in the early hours of Friday as the deafening blasts from the outskirts of Gaza City, which lies about a mile from the frontier, jolted people awake as their apartment blocks shook.

Palestinians living in areas close to the Gaza-Israel border fled their homes in pickup trucks, on donkeys and by foot. Some went to UN-run schools in Gaza City, carrying small children, household essentials and food.

Hedaia Maarouf, who left her home with her extended family of 19 people, including 13 children, said: “We were terrified for our children, who were screaming and shaking.”

In northern Gaza, Rafat Tanani, his pregnant wife and four children were killed after an Israeli warplane reduced a building to rubble, residents said.

[Mob violence a bigger threat to Israel than Gaza, says Netanyahu](#)
[Read more](#)

The number of injured rose to 830 overnight, an increase of 200 in 10 hours, according to the Gaza health ministry. The death toll stood at 119, including 27 children, it said.

The UN said that more than 200 homes and 24 schools had been destroyed or severely damaged in the [Gaza](#) Strip in Israeli air raids in the past five days. It also warned that residents’ access to fresh water could be limited because of power cuts and damage to pipe networks.

Power supplies may also be cut further as a result of the military action. At the moment, most families have power for four or five hours a day, with hospitals and businesses relying on generators. But as fuel supplies run low, more blackouts are expected.

02:42

Gaza residents flee homes as Israeli attacks intensify – video report

Hamas and other militant groups continued to fire rockets into Israel, with warning sirens sounding in towns and communities. The Israeli military said it had intercepted at least five drones carrying explosives launched from Gaza since Thursday.

Nine people have been killed in Israel, including a child and a soldier.

Shortly after midnight, the Israeli military issued [a statement](#) saying: “[Israel Defence Forces] air and ground troops are currently attacking in the Gaza Strip.”

It later clarified that there were no troops inside Gaza, suggesting it was not a ground invasion but artillery and tank fire from the border. “Clarification: there are currently no IDF ground troops inside the Gaza Strip. IDF air and ground forces are carrying out strikes on targets in the Gaza Strip,” the statement said.

It added that fresh airstrikes had been carried out against what it called a “number of Hamas launch sites and observation posts in Gaza”.



A Palestinian family flee from their house during Israeli airstrikes in the east of Gaza City early on Friday. Photograph: Mohammed Saber/EPA

Shortly after the initial military announcement, in an apparent reference to the operation, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, [tweeted](#): "The last word was not said and this operation will continue as long as necessary."

Later on Friday morning, the IDF released a statement saying that an operation of 160 aircraft had "struck over 150 underground targets in the northern Gaza Strip" over the course of the night. The statement claimed that the purpose of the operation was to damage underground tunnels built by Hamas. Israel's forces destroyed "many kilometres" of the tunnels during the attack, it claimed.

The Israeli military has drawn up plans for a possible ground operation in Gaza, telling its forces to "prepare for battle". Thousands of reservists have been called up and leave for all combat units has been cancelled.

[Graphic](#)

Israel was also hit by further communal violence for a fourth night with Jews and Arabs clashing in the town of Lod. A synagogue was torched overnight and 43 people were arrested, according to police.

The Shin Bet security service said it was involved in tackling the violence in Jewish-Arab cities, which it described as "terror for all intents and purposes".

It was using its "intelligence collecting capabilities" to learn about any plans to carry out attacks or engage in violent clashes and "to locate, arrest, investigate and put the perpetrators on trial", it said in a statement.

"We won't allow violent rioters to impose terror on the streets of Israel, either by Arabs or Jews," said Shin Bet's chief, Nadav Argaman.

Political leaders have said that [violent street clashes between Jews and Arabs inside the country](#) pose a bigger threat than the escalating military conflict with Gaza.



Rockets being fired towards Israel from Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on Friday. Photograph: Anas Baba/AFP/Getty Images

“We have no bigger threat now than these pogroms, and we have no choice but to restore law and order via determined use of force,” said Netanyahu on a visit to the town on Thursday.

Israel’s president, Reuven Rivlin, said a “civil war [would] be a danger to our existence, more than all the dangers we have from the outside”.

Intercommunal violence, including [beatings, stabbings, shooting and arson](#), has this week been reported across the country, from Beersheba in the southern Negev to Tiberias and Haifa in the north.

Hundreds of people have been arrested, and border police have been redeployed from the occupied West Bank to towns inside Israel. “We’re in an emergency, the defence minister, Benny Gantz, said in a statement.

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[Israel](#)

Israel launches fresh Gaza attacks amid rocket fire – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/may/13/israel-launches-ground-operation-in-gaza-after-days-of-airstrikes-follow-updates>

Israel

‘This is more than a reaction to rockets’: communal violence spreads in Israel

Old and new tensions between Israel’s Jewish and Arab citizens have exploded into riots and attacks



A man sits at a restaurant attacked the previous night in the city of Bat Yam.
Photograph: Gil Cohen-Magen/AFP/Getty Images

A man sits at a restaurant attacked the previous night in the city of Bat Yam.
Photograph: Gil Cohen-Magen/AFP/Getty Images



[Peter Beaumont](#) *Quique Kierszenbaum in Lod and Sufian Taha in Jerusalem*
Thu 13 May 2021 10.19 EDT

The mob that rampaged along the seafront promenade in Bat Yam, a southern suburb of Tel Aviv, started by attacking businesses owned by Palestinian citizens of [Israel](#).

The young far-right Jews, some dressed in black and chanting “death to Arabs”, had gathered after a callout on social media that explicitly threatened violence.

After smashing the window of an Israeli-Arab owned ice-cream parlour frequented by both communities, they turned their attention to a passing motorist they had identified as an Israeli Arab, [dragging him from his car](#) and beating him savagely before leaving him to lie in the road for 15 minutes until police arrived.

The attack was caught live on camera by Israel’s Channel 11. The reporter Daniel Elazar warned: “We’re watching a lynching in real time. There are no police here,” before the camera pulled away at the anchor’s request.

The assault in Bat Yam was not an isolated incident. Since the rapid escalation in fighting between Hamas and Israel, in which rockets have been

fired at Israeli cities including the metropolitan area with Tel Aviv at its centre, communal tensions between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel have exploded into riots and violent attacks, with some people warning of the risk of civil war.

By Thursday, communal violence had been reported from Beersheba in the southern Negev desert to Rahat, Ramla, Lod, Nasiriyah, Tiberias, Jerusalem and Haifa. There have been riots, stabbings, arson, attempted home invasions and shootings, some of it captured in terrifying detail on social media.

The alarm has been enough to prompt fearful editorials, including in the conservative Jerusalem Post which warned that “the delicate and vastly imperfect coexistence that has existed between Jewish and Arab Israelis for the last 73 years now risks fraying beyond recognition”.

In Acre, a 37-year-old Jewish teacher was attacked in his car by Israeli-Arab demonstrators near Egged Square and sustained serious injuries, a day after protesters torched Uri Buri, a well-known Jewish-owned seafood restaurant.

Sameer Salem, a 58-year-old Arab-Israeli driving teacher in Acre, blamed both sides for the increasing confrontations. Describing the initial protests, he said: “We wanted to send a message to the international community to protest what happened in al-Aqsa and Jerusalem, not be involved in the damage to property that happened.

“The protesters vandalised and burned shops, and that’s not right for the Jews in Acre. [Then] extremist Jews gathered last night and attacked the Arab residents of Acre. We don’t know where things will end. But the situation is very dangerous.”

On Thursday morning Israel’s defence minister, Benny Gantz, ordered a “massive reinforcement” of border police forces in cities across Israel to “cool off” the situation. “We’re in an emergency,” Gantz said in a statement.

02:18

Israel-Gaza violence: flattened buildings, rockets and communal unrest – video

What some observers are describing as the worst outbreak of communal violence in two decades has been fuelled by a combination of tensions immediate and more long-lasting. Israel's Arabs make up about 20% of the population and are the descendants of Palestinians who stayed in the country after the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, when an estimated 700,000 fled.

While they have citizenship, including the right to vote, they face widespread discrimination, and because they largely identify with the Palestinian cause many Israelis view them with suspicion.

In recent days, Arab citizens of Israel have held mass protests across the country over Israel's policing of a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem and plans to evict dozens of Palestinian families in the city after a legal campaign by Jewish settlers.

There has been a resurgence in recent weeks of the activities of overtly anti-Arab groups such as Lehava, racist football hooligans known as La Familia, and far-right settler groups, who have reportedly been involved in the violence.

One recent message sent by La Familia, described by the Haaretz journalist Bar Peleg, called on supporters to head to Jaffa, where it said there was a minimal police presence, naming the streets where it might be possible to enter Arab homes and stab occupants.

But it has been in the [mixed city of Lod](#) where some of the most alarming scenes have been witnessed and where violence has continued, including the stabbing of Jewish man on his way to synagogue and the attack on a pregnant Arab woman, who suffered serious head injuries.

[Israel's army drafts Gaza ground operation plan as mob violence escalates](#)
[Read more](#)

The situation has been enflamed by the rhetoric of local elected officials, including the deputy mayor, Yosi Harush, who was caught on video at a council meeting saying hundreds of people were coming from the West

Bank settlements to protect Jewish houses and “help with the security”, warning Arab residents not to leave their homes.

Dahlia Scheindlin, an Israeli political analyst, echoes the views of many in saying that the communal violence is unprecedented in her experience. “It’s really bad,” she told the Guardian, returning home from Bat Yam. “It feels like ethnic conflict. People going out in the streets to find and do violence to people from the other community. This is more than a reaction to Hamas’s rockets. There’s something deeper going on under the surface.”

She added: “I don’t believe in both-siderism. It may look like this is mutual, but this is coming from very different places.”

On the Israeli side, Scheindlin argues, a key factor has been the increasing normalisation of the far right over a long period of years, in which leaders such as Benjamin Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman have used the politics of racism to appeal to voters, creating an opening for more extreme figures. This, say Scheindlin and others, has allowed far-right violent groups to flourish.

On the Arab-Israeli side, Scheindlin blames the under-policing of violent crime and the over-policing of perceived threats to Jews for exacerbating tensions. “It’s a disaster. The question is what can be done?. At the moment the first and last resort is force and ever more heavy policing.”

Inevitably it has been left to figures who have previously benefited politically from inflammatory rhetoric, including Netanyahu, to try to calm the situation.

“What has been happening in the last few days in the cities of Israel is unacceptable,” Netanyahu said. “Nothing justifies the lynching of Arabs by Jews and nothing justifies the lynching of Jews by Arabs.”

This article was downloaded by calibre from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/13/this-is-more-than-a-reaction-to-rockets-communal-violence-spreads-in-israel>

[Israel](#)

Violence and mayhem offer Benjamin Netanyahu refuge

Analysis: The Israeli PM seemed to be on the way out, until the eruption of conflict with the Palestinians



Benjamin Netanyahu tours the riot-hit city of Lod. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

Benjamin Netanyahu tours the riot-hit city of Lod. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

[*Harriet Sherwood*](#)

[*@harrietsherwood*](#)

Thu 13 May 2021 08.58 EDT

The escalating conflict between [Israel](#) and Gaza has put efforts to form a coalition government that excludes Israel's longest-serving prime minister on the back burner.

Until violence erupted this week, [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) appeared to be on the verge of losing his position at the helm of Israeli politics after 12 years as prime minister.

The country's fourth inconclusive general election in the past two years had led to the opposition leader, Yair Lapid, being asked to try to put together a coalition. But the flow of rockets and missiles between Israel and [Gaza](#), plus intercommunal violence within Israel itself, has complicated those efforts.

Lapid has a deadline of 2 June to form a workable coalition, although that timeframe is likely to be in doubt should the current hostilities continue. Meanwhile, Netanyahu is seeking to reinforce his reputation as a strong leader willing to stand up to Palestinian militants with uncompromising rhetoric about inflicting mortal blows on Hamas and "iron fists".

Alluding to his own "united, strong and forceful leadership", Netanyahu said on Wednesday: "We are working with all our might to protect Israel from enemies outside and rioters within."

Although Netanyahu has presided over two previous military operations in Gaza in 2012 and 2014, this time there is a significant difference.

One of his successes over the past 12 years has been largely to detach the Palestinian issue from the day-to-day lives of most Israelis. The occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza has not been a significant factor in recent elections. Apart from clashes across the Gaza border, violence has been confined mainly to flashpoints in the occupied West Bank.

But the eruption this week of riots and violent attacks between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel in towns in which there had been a degree of coexistence has brought the issue close to home.

Lapid said there had been a "complete loss of control" and accused Netanyahu of "leading us to anarchy". He added: "Jewish and Arab rioters have declared war on Israel, and there's no response, no government, no police, no leadership."

Writing in Yedioth Ahronoth, Israel's biggest-circulation newspaper, the commentator Nadav Eyal said: "We are seeing dissolution; we are seeing the fracturing of our social compact."

Louis Fishman, an associate professor at Brooklyn College, [wrote in Haaretz](#) that Netanyahu's "greatest magic trick" had been to blind Israeli Jews to their state's oppression of the Palestinians. "But even the most carefully constructed house of cards eventually starts tumbling down, and that exactly is what is happening now ... Impregnable Netanyahuism, the work of a master illusionist, is shattering."

Lapid said the events of the past week were "no excuse" for keeping Netanyahu in place. "Quite the opposite. They are exactly the reason why he should be replaced as soon as possible."

[Israel's army drafts Gaza ground operation plan as mob violence escalates](#)
[Read more](#)

But that will not be an easy task. The small parties across the political spectrum that are Lapid's potential partners are likely to struggle to put aside their differences. Lapid, a former television journalist, lacks heavyweight political and military experience in the context of a major conflict.

On top of the political threat to his premiership and current criticism over the mayhem in mixed Israeli towns, Netanyahu is also the first serving Israeli prime minister to stand trial on criminal charges, including fraud and bribery. He denies the charges, saying he is the victim of a politically motivated witch-hunt.

The wheels of Israeli justice turn slowly, but the prospect of a conviction and jail sentence at some point in the future must be part of the complex calculations over his survival.

For the moment, however, the current conflict provides some protection. "Netanyahu is exactly where he wants to be, in the middle of a major crisis, where you don't want to change the prime minister," Mitchell Barak, a political analyst based in Jerusalem, [told the New York Times](#). "Everything's wide open."

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2021.05.14 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: Japan prefectures to declare emergency; Ireland's health IT systems suffer ransomware attack](#)
- [Self-isolation Boost payments or risk Covid resurgence, experts say](#)
- [Pfizer Delay in giving second jabs of vaccine improves immunity, says study](#)
- ['It's a minefield' US restaurant workers leave industry over Covid](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Second pandemic year to be deadlier than first, warns WHO – as it happened

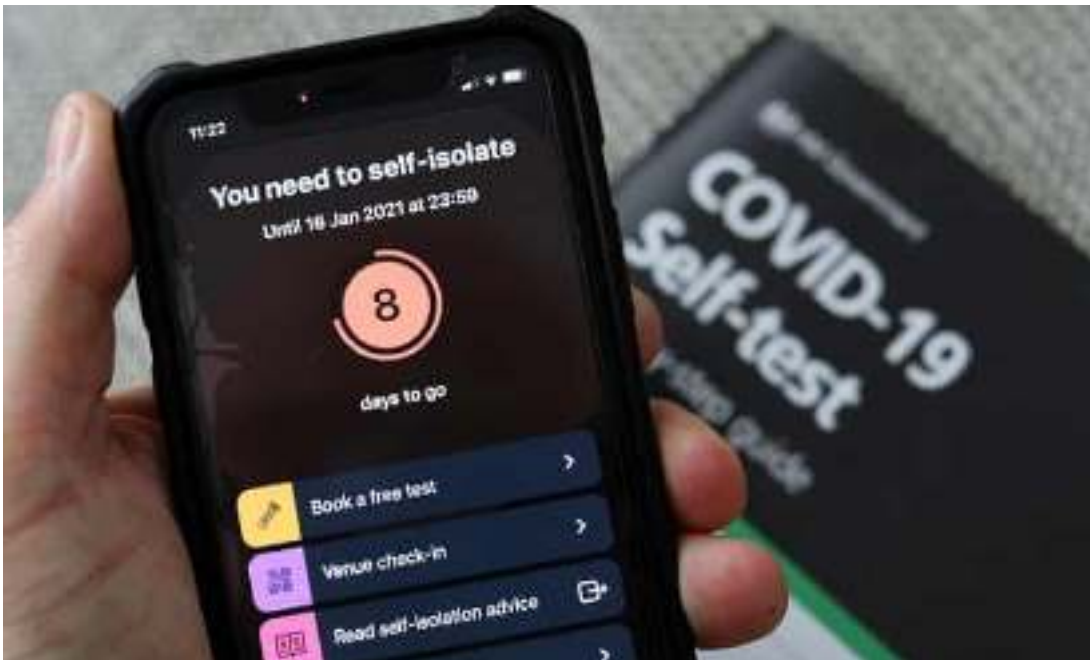
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[Coronavirus](#)

Boost self-isolation payments or risk Covid resurgence, experts say

Thinktanks urge UK government to fund system that would cover wages on a similar basis to furlough scheme

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Low adherence to requests to self-isolate has been a major flaw in the UK's Covid response, experts say. Photograph: Huw Fairclough/Getty

Low adherence to requests to self-isolate has been a major flaw in the UK's Covid response, experts say. Photograph: Huw Fairclough/Getty

[Denis Campbell](#) *Health policy editor*

Thu 13 May 2021 19.01 EDT

Payments to allow people with Covid symptoms to self-isolate need to be increased sharply or a return to normal life could lead to a resurgence in infections and deaths, ministers are being warned.

Two leading thinktanks have proposed that the government funds grants for employers and the self-employed, on a similar basis to the furlough scheme, to encourage more people to isolate.

Doctors, public health experts and [opposition parties believe](#) that low adherence to the request to self-isolate has been a major flaw in Britain's response to the pandemic and allowed coronavirus to spread.

[One recent study](#) found that almost half of those displaying symptoms did not bother to stay at home, often because they could not afford to lose income from not working.

The Resolution Foundation and the Nuffield Trust are urging ministers to introduce a scheme in which employers could apply for a grant to cover the wages of any employee who needed to self-isolate, using a modified version of the existing coronavirus job retention scheme.

Self-employed workers would be able to obtain similar levels of support, also in the form a grant, through the self-employment income support scheme.

If implemented, the new payments system would cover 100% of a worker's wages, capped at the equivalent of £2,500 a month, or £822 for a typical 10-day spell in isolation. That is equal to the cap used in the furlough scheme, which has [subsidised workers' wages since last year](#).

It would cost the government between £27m and £39m a month, a fraction of the £1.25bn monthly cost of the [heavily criticised test-and-trace programme](#), the thinktanks said.

The amounts available for self-isolation have been too low, and therefore contributed to the virus spreading as people have continued to work to earn money, they argued.

“The support available for people to self-isolate has been a blind spot in our response to the pandemic. Compliance with test-and-trace requests to self-isolate are low, with evidence pointing to loss of income as a key barrier for people,” said Sarah Reed, a senior fellow at the Nuffield Trust.

Timeline

How England's Covid lockdown is being lifted

Show

8 March 2021

Step 1, part 1

In effect from 8 March, all pupils and college students returned fully. Care home residents could receive one regular, named visitor.

29 March 2021

Step 1, part 2

In effect from 29 March, outdoor gatherings allowed of up to six people, or two households if this is larger, not just in parks but also gardens. Outdoor sport for children and adults allowed. The official stay at home order ended, but people encouraged to stay local. People still asked to work from home where possible, with no overseas travel allowed beyond the current small number of exceptions.

12 April 2021

Step 2

In effect from 12 April, non-essential retail, hair and nail salons, and some public buildings such as libraries and commercial art galleries reopened. Most outdoor venues can reopen, including pubs and restaurants, but only for outdoor tables and beer gardens. Customers will have to be seated but there will be no need to have a meal with alcohol.

Also reopen are settings such as zoos and theme parks. However, social contact rules still apply here, so no indoor mixing between households and limits on outdoor mixing. Indoor leisure facilities such as gyms and pools

can also open, but again people can only go alone or with their own household. Reopening of holiday lets with no shared facilities is also allowed, but only for one household. Funerals can have up to 30 attendees, while weddings, receptions and wakes can have 15.

17 May 2021

Step 3

From 17 May people will be able to meet indoors in groups of up to six or as two households, or outdoors in groups of up to 30 people. People can also choose whether to socially distance with close family and friends, meaning that they can sit close together and hug. In care homes, residents will be able to have up to five named visitors and be entitled to make low risk visits out of the home.

People can meet in private homes, or in pubs, bars and restaurants, which will all be able to reopen indoors. Weddings, receptions and other life events can take place with up to 30 people. The cap on numbers attending funerals will depend on the size of the venue.

Most forms of indoor entertainment where social distancing is possible will also be able to resume, including cinemas, museums and children's play areas. Theatres, concert halls, conference centres and sports stadia will have capacity limits in place.

Organised adult sport and exercise classes can resume indoors and saunas and steam rooms will reopen.

Hotels, hostels and B&Bs in the UK will allow overnight stays in groups of up to six people or two households.

People will also be able to travel to a small number of [countries on the green list](#) and will not have to quarantine on return.

Pupils will no longer be expected to wear face coverings in classrooms or in communal areas in secondary schools and colleges as a result of decreasing infection rates. Twice weekly home testing will remain in place. School trips with overnight stays will also now be possible.

21 June 2021

Step 4

No earlier than 21 June, all legal limits will be removed on mixing, and the last sectors to remain closed, such as nightclubs, will reopen. Large events can take place.

Peter Walker *Political correspondent* and **Rachel Hall**

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

“Without proper self-isolation support too many people have been put in the difficult position of choosing between doing the right thing or risking their livelihoods.

“Many other countries have not had this problem. Either they have more generous sick pay policies already, or they were quicker to put comprehensive self-isolation payments in place.

“For example, Austria, Finland and Germany cover 100% of lost earnings if they are self-isolating.”

[India Covid variant: is it a threat to the UK's reopening plans?](#)

[Read more](#)

A joint report by the thinktanks says that: “The £500 self-isolation support payments only cover about one in eight workers and statutory sick pay only covers a quarter of the average worker’s earnings, and misses out 2 million of the lowest-paid workers altogether.”

Reed said: “Now is the time to fix this weakness in our defence strategy. The pandemic is not over yet. Cases are expected to increase alongside easing restrictions, while new variants test us, and the ongoing vaccination campaign continues.”

Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, has backed the plan. “Without fixing this gaping hole in our defences we risk undermining the

work done to bring the virus under control. Ministers cannot afford to ignore calls to introduce proper sick pay. Our path out of the pandemic depends on it,” he said. The Department of Health and Social Care was approached for comment.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/14/boost-self-isolation-payments-or-risk-covid-resurgence-experts-say>.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Immunology.

Delay in giving second jabs of Pfizer vaccine improves immunity

Study finds antibodies against Sars-CoV-2 three-and-a-half times higher in people vaccinated again after 12 weeks rather than three

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Pfizer-BioNTech vials at a British vaccination centre, January. A Birmingham University blood analysis study of people over 80 found elevated antibodies when the booster was given after a three-month gap. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

Pfizer-BioNTech vials at a British vaccination centre, January. A Birmingham University blood analysis study of people over 80 found elevated antibodies when the booster was given after a three-month gap. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

[Ian Sample](#) *Science editor*

[@iansample](#)

Thu 13 May 2021 19.05 EDT

The UK's decision to delay second doses of coronavirus vaccines has received fresh support from research on the over-80s which found that giving the Pfizer/BioNTech booster after 12 weeks rather than three produced a much stronger antibody response.

A study led by the University of Birmingham in collaboration with [Public Health](#) England found that antibodies against the virus were three-and-a-half times higher in those who had the second shot after 12 weeks compared with those who had it after a three-week interval.

Most people who have both shots of the vaccine will be well protected regardless of the timing, but the stronger response from the extra delay might prolong protection because antibody levels naturally wane over time.

Dr Helen Parry, a senior author on the study at Birmingham, said: "We've shown that peak antibody responses after the second Pfizer vaccination are really strongly boosted in older people when this is delayed to 11 to 12 weeks. There is a marked difference between these two schedules in terms of antibody responses we see."

In the first weeks of the vaccine programme the UK took the bold decision to delay administering booster shots so that more elderly and vulnerable people could more quickly receive their first shots.

The move was controversial because medicines regulators approved both the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines on the basis of clinical trials that spaced out the doses by only three or four weeks.

Researchers from Oxford University showed in February that [antibody responses were more than twice as strong](#) when boosters of their vaccine were delayed for 12 weeks. But the latest study is the first to compare immune responses after different timings with the Pfizer/BioNTech jab.

The scientists analysed blood samples from 175 over-80s after their first vaccine and again two to three weeks after the booster. Among the participants 99 had the second shot after three weeks, while 73 waited 12 weeks. After the second dose, all had antibodies against the virus's spike protein, but the level was 3.5 times higher in the 12-week group.

The researchers then looked at another arm of the immune system, the T cells that destroy infected cells. They found that T cell responses were weaker when the booster was delayed, but settled down to similar levels when people were tested more than three months after the first shot. Details are published in pre-print form and have yet to be peer reviewed.

“This study further supports the growing body of evidence that the approach taken in the UK of delaying that second dose has really paid off,” said Dr Gayatri Amirthalingam, consultant epidemiologist at Public Health England.

“Individuals need to really complete their second dose when it's offered to them because it not only provides additional protection but potentially longer lasting protection against Covid-19.”

The findings come as new data from Public Health England suggested that the vaccination programme had prevented 11,700 deaths by the end of April 2021 in those aged 60 and over, and at least 33,000 hospitalisations in those aged 65 and over in the same period.

“Overall, these data add considerable support to the policy of delaying the second dose of Covid-19 vaccine when vaccine availability is limited and the at-risk population is large,” said Eleanor Riley, professor of immunology and infectious disease at the University of Edinburgh.

“Longer term follow-up of this cohort will help us to understand which vaccine interval will be optimal in the future, once the immediate crisis is over.”

[US news](#)

‘It’s a minefield’: US restaurant workers leave industry over Covid

Workers cite exploitative practices and lack of Covid safety protections as some employers and officials claim unemployment benefits deter people from returning to work



People dine outside in New York City on 4 May. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

People dine outside in New York City on 4 May. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

[*Michael Sainato*](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 05.30 EDT

Jake Galardi Marko has worked in the restaurant industry for the past 10 years, and recently took a new server position at a Cheesecake Factory in

Las Vegas, after quitting his job at the Olive Garden of two years during the pandemic due to [abuse](#) from customers over Covid-19 protections.

[Cars, lumber and chicken: the shortages triggered by the end of lockdowns](#)
[Read more](#)

“It’s a minefield of unsafe working environments and exploitative practices still permeate the hiring and training processes,” he said. “People always say but we make tips so it can’t be that bad. This is used as an excuse to ignore abusive and exploitative practices.”

Before starting his new position, he applied to dozens of restaurants and had several interviews, and noted many restaurants are in a chaotic state and unprepared to take on new workers. He said they are baiting potential hires with signing bonuses that don’t pan out, promises of higher wages, or applying for a position only to be told on the first day of hire they have to start out as a busser and work their way up. He left one job because the restaurant was not enforcing coronavirus safety protections.

“I contemplate leaving the industry every day. Most of us do but we have bills to pay, rent comes due every month. A lot of us have kids to support,” he added. “The entire industry preys upon desperation.”

Yet the restaurant industry has been the source of recent claims of a labor shortage, with the US Chamber of Commerce, some employers, and Republican-elected officials claiming unemployment benefits are deterring Americans from returning to work. This was especially the case after last week’s unexpectedly poor job numbers which showed that the jobless rate was remaining stubbornly high in the US.

The entire industry preys upon desperation

Jake Galardi Marko

Republican-led states [Montana](#), [Iowa](#), [Missouri](#), [Tennessee](#), [Alabama](#), [North Dakota](#), [South Carolina](#), [Arkansas and Mississippi](#) have now cited the claims in decisions to end federal unemployment benefits.

Economists from the [Federal Reserve chair, Jerome Powell](#), and the [secretary of the treasury, Janet Yellen](#), to Goldman Sachs economist Jan Hatzius have [dismissed](#) sweeping claims that unemployment benefits are the driving factor for some industries experiencing issues with hiring new or replacement workers.

A [recent analysis](#) by the Economic Policy Institute noted through March there were an average of 9.8 million unemployed workers compared to 8.1m job openings. Several industries, including the accommodation and food service industries, had more than 1.5 unemployed workers per job opening.

In regards to labor shortage claims, the Economic Policy Institute noted such claims would be short-lived as the accommodation and food service industry added 241,400 jobs in April last year. The leisure and hospitality sectors have [experienced](#) the most rapid employment growth over the past month, and economists with the Economic Policy Institute warned of the negative economic consequences of cutting pandemic unemployment insurance benefits.

Workers in the restaurant industry say that any issues the industry is experiencing in hiring enough workers is a result of low wages, safety concerns and harassment from customers over Covid-19 protocols

According to a [report](#) published by One Fair Wage and the UC Berkeley Food Labor Research Center in May 2021, 53% of workers in the restaurant industry have considered leaving their job since the pandemic started, with low wages and tips, safety concerns, and harassment from customers as the primary reasons provided by workers.

Workers in the restaurant industry were among the highest sectors of workers who died of coronavirus during the pandemic, according to a University of California San Francisco [study](#) published in January.

Crystal Maher, a bartender at Parkside Projects in Austin,, views the blaming of unemployment benefits on hiring difficulties of restaurants as an excuse to try to avoid changing how workers are treated in the industry.

“What are we going back to? I don’t get my schedule until Friday of the week before so I never get to plan anything I have anymore. I can’t get stability on my income anymore because I’m based on that tip system,” said Maher. “The old restaurant mentality is gone and a lot of bosses don’t get that yet. That stuff has to change. Until we see that stuff change, people are probably not going to come back to the industry in droves.”

Workers in the fast-food industry in particular have [criticized](#) low wages, safety concerns, understaffing and harassment throughout the pandemic, as annual employee turnover in the industry was [over 100%](#) prior to Covid-19.

“We’re very short staffed, regardless of hiring,” said Allen Strickland, a team leader at Arby’s in Kansas City, who makes \$11.50 an hour. “The pay is really not worth it, but I have to make it happen for my family and me.”

Cris Cardona, a shift manager at a McDonald’s in Orlando, is one of several workers at the fast-food chain in at least 15 US cities who will participate in a daylong [strike on 19 May](#) to demand the company raise its minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Cardona has worked at McDonald’s for four years, and makes just over \$11 an hour, which he explained has prevented him from moving out of his parents’ home, getting his own car, or being able to go attend college.

“They call us essential, but the reality is they treat us like we’re disposable,” said Cardona. “They like to say that no one wants to work, that they’re having trouble finding workers and they blame this on unemployment benefits, but the problem is no one wants to work for a poverty wage, to risk their lives for \$7.25 an hour.”

2021.05.14 - Spotlight

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- Pedro Almodóvar and Tilda Swinton I love the idea of the woman on the edge of the abyss
- Experience I'm allergic to water
- The startling film about Stalin's funeral It's impossible to take your eyes off this infinitely dear face

Bristol

‘Bristol does things differently’: Green party emerges as city’s rising force

Success in the local council elections has raised the party’s hopes of a parliamentary seat



Yassin Mohamud (left) with a supporter, Abdihakim Asir, the chair of Bristol Somali Community Association. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

Yassin Mohamud (left) with a supporter, Abdihakim Asir, the chair of Bristol Somali Community Association. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian



[Steven Morris](#)

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Fri 14 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Four days on from one of the most eye-catching results in England's local council elections, [Yassin Mohamud](#), the new Green member for the Bristol inner city ward of Lawrence Hill, still has to stop every few minutes to accept the congratulations of residents, neighbours, shopkeepers and taxi drivers when he walks down to the shops.

"It's very exciting," said Mohamud. "I can't wait to get on with the job. This area has been neglected for too long. There is so much litter, drugs, air pollution, antisocial behaviour. Things must change."

Mohamud, a 49-year-old administrator who came to the UK from Somalia 16 years ago, used to vote Labour but began knocking on doors for the Green party in November 2018. "Labour wasn't doing anything for this area," he said. "People wanted a change and they could see we wanted to listen to them."

The Greens went into the elections holding 11 of the seats on [Bristol](#) city council and ended with 24, making them the joint biggest party with Labour,

who slipped from 37.

Green candidates won not just in Bristol's leafy areas but also took seats in what were thought of as Labour strongholds, such as Eastville and Lockleaze in the north, Bedminster in the south and [Lawrence Hill](#), one of the most deprived wards in south-west England, in the east.

Jon Eccles, who just failed to win a second seat for the Greens in Lawrence Hill, said a lot of the party's success in Bristol was down to sheer hard work. He said when he joined the Greens he was struck by their "method". Candidates were not required to sign up to a certain ideology, he said, but were expected to commit to a certain amount of work.

"Work means knocking on doors of residents, finding out what they think, putting things they talk to you about in leaflets. They see you are paying attention. Then when you talk to them about the climate they are more likely to listen."

At 18, [Lily Fitzgibbon](#) becomes the youngest Bristol city councillor. She was a founding member of [Bristol Youth Strike 4 Climate](#), which played a key role in [the campaign against the expansion of Bristol airport](#) and helped organise a [climate emergency protest in Bristol attended by Greta Thunberg](#).

Fitzgibbon, who works in a fruit and veg shop on Bristol's fiercely independent Gloucester Road, said she believed the party's success was down to its approach not only to global and national issues but to local ones.

So, people in her ward, Bishopston and Ashley Down, talked on the doorstep about the climate emergency, [the Bristol Black Lives Matter protest last summer that ended with the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston being dumped in the harbour](#) and this year's string of "kill the bill" demonstrations in the city.

[Graphic](#)

But they also talked about local traffic, air quality and the plight of a 120-year-old holm oak in the neighbourhood that had been in danger of being felled.

“Bristol is such an environmentally and socially conscious place,” Fitzgibbon said. “It’s a place of protest culture and I think people have realised there are options outside the two main parties.”

[Carla Denyer](#), one of the Green group’s most prominent councillors, insisted this was no flash in the pan. “This has been building, building, building,” she said.

“People have flocked to the Greens in droves because there is frustration in how the Labour administration has run the city, not moving quickly enough on the climate emergency,” she said.

But, she says, she has also worked hard on local issues in her Clifton Down ward: bin collections, recycling, [the shortage of affordable housing in the city](#).

“When people get Green elected representatives, they like it, we work really hard. Lots of people told us they hadn’t voted Green before but they’ve seen that we’re genuine, the real deal.”

Denyer believes the council elections bode well for the Greens’ aspiration of winning a UK parliamentary seat: Bristol West.

In the 2019 election for that seat, Denyer came in second, trailing well behind Labour’s Thangam Debbonaire. But the Greens now have councillors in nine of the 10 wards in the Bristol West constituency. “We are the second party in Bristol now but arguably, the first in Bristol West,” she said.

Labour takes some comfort from the victory in the Bristol mayoral election of [Marvin Rees](#). He remains by far the most powerful political figure in the city. The election of the former UK Labour minister [Dan Norris as West of England mayor also steadied the ship](#).

But results in wards such as Easton – where Rees lives – were a bitter blow. The Greens took both seats including that of the respected Labour cabinet member Afzal Shah, who was the only councillor of Pakistani heritage.

Areas such as Easton have become magnets for people from London and the south-east looking for an alternative lifestyle and for the very many

university students who stay after their courses end.

Shah, who was cabinet member for climate, ecology and sustainable growth reeled off the city's environmental achievements – from its [climate emergency action plan](#) to its tree-planting efforts. He said demographics in his neighbourhood had changed and there had been a problem this time mobilising the black, Asian and minority ethnic vote – and it did not help that the election fell in Ramadan.

Mayor Rees expressed concern at the lack of diversity in the new council and said he was disappointed at “white middle-class councillors jumping for joy” about defeating Shah.

He added: “We have to ask questions about race and class. You’ve got an area like Easton that has traditionally been very mixed, very working-class, where house prices are now going over £400,000. Is it gentrification that supports the progress of the Green party in racially diverse areas?”

Rees, who in 2016 became the first mayor of black African heritage in a major European city, pointed out that he was the only mayoral candidate this time from the four major parties who did not go to private school. “But race and class was never talked about.”

On working with the Greens, Rees said: “If you want to work with me, tell me what you are going to do for the city and then tell me what you need from me to get it done. I’m interested in talking to people who want to get things done. That’s how it will work.”

[George Ferguson](#), who was Bristol’s first directly elected mayor (as an independent) said he thought the Greens’ success was a “big moment” for politics in Bristol – and more widely.

“Bristol is a major city. These results needs to be taken really seriously as a potential springboard for the Greens,” he said. “I love the way Bristol does things differently.”

But Bristol may be a one-off. It is, after all, [the home of the street artist Banksy](#), of protest and rebellion, of underground music scenes and

campaigning organisations such as the Soil Association and the walking and cycling charity Sustrans.

Matthew Goodwin, [professor of politics and international relations at the University of Kent](#), said the Greens were “potentially in a very interesting space in British politics”. “They could quite easily pull away liberal graduates, young Zoomers and middle-class professionals from Labour, as we are seeing in other European democracies, notably Germany and the Netherlands. If they play their cards right sky’s the limit.”

Bristol University English literature professor [Tom Sperlinger](#) said he thought it was well worth watching to see whether Labour and the Greens could work together.

“I think Bristol is going to be an interesting experiment in the next few years,” he said. “There’s clearly a big progressive majority in the city now and people are very motivated on the ecological crisis and inequality.

“Can a pluralistic left show what it can achieve in partnership or will it descend into a party political squabble? I think the national parties would do well to see the city as an experiment in how to build a larger coalition of the left.”

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[Tilda Swinton](#)

Interview

Pedro Almodóvar and Tilda Swinton: ‘I love the idea of the woman on the edge of the abyss’

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



Pedro Almodóvar and Tilda Swinton. Photograph: Ó El Deseo/Nico Bustos

Pedro Almodóvar and Tilda Swinton. Photograph: Ó El Deseo/Nico Bustos

The director and actor have finally achieved ‘a far-fetched dream’ by working together on his first film in English, *The Human Voice*. They talk about their mutual admiration, filming in lockdown – and how falling in love can destroy your sense of humour

Fri 14 May 2021 01.00 EDT

For more than 30 years, the film-maker [Pedro Almodóvar](#) has had a voice in his head – *The Human Voice*, that is. In [Jean Cocteau’s monologue](#), first

performed in 1930, a woman goes to pieces during a telephone conversation with her soon-to-be-ex lover. The audience hears only one side of the exchange, lending her the upper hand in the drama at the precise moment she has been robbed of everything else.

Almodóvar has now adapted Cocteau's piece into a typically plush half-hour short starring Tilda Swinton as the injured party, though this isn't his first brush with the material. A performance of the play is glimpsed in his seamy 1987 masterpiece [The Law of Desire](#), while it was also the inspiration for [Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown](#), the 1988 screwball comedy that gave him his first international hit.

Why has it haunted him for so long? "This is such a mystery," he tells me – by phone, appropriately enough, in between rehearsals with [Penélope Cruz](#) for their latest collaboration, *Parallel Mothers*. "It's a dramatic situation I love. More than once I've used that idea of the abandoned woman standing on the edge of the abyss. It injects a certain dynamism into what comes next because she has lost all control."

The short retains elements of his earlier homages to the play: the axe with which Carmen Maura destroys the set in *The Law of Desire* is now wielded by Swinton, while there is also a fire in the apartment in the new film, as there was in *Women on the Verge*. This modern take on Cocteau (which follows previous interpretations: Anna Magnani in Roberto Rossellini's 1948 film *L'amore*, and Ingrid Bergman in a 1966 TV movie, as well as an opera by Francis Poulenc) has picked up bits and bobs from Almodóvar's back catalogue on its way to the screen.



Swinton chooses an axe in *The Human Voice*. Photograph: Iglesias Mas/El Deseo D.A. S.L.U.

It has also received an infusion of his own experience. “I’m going to give you one example,” he says. “But don’t ask for more.” He points me toward the moment in the film when Swinton’s character confesses that she can never be funny in her lover’s presence. She can be “special, daring, submissive, thin, passionate”, she admits, but she loses her sense of humour when she is crazy about someone. “That has happened to me,” Almodóvar says. “Isn’t that awful?”

The director, who had one of his biggest critical successes in 2019 with the contemplative, Oscar-nominated [Pain and Glory](#), is now 71. When he first set out to adapt the play, only to accidentally write *Women on the Verge* instead, he was in his late 30s and renowned for punky, scandalous comedies and psycho-dramas. How did his approach to the text change in the interim? “When I re-read it now, it seemed to me that the female character was too submissive. I felt a modern-day woman wouldn’t be able to identify with that behaviour. It just doesn’t happen now, does it? What I tried was to give Tilda’s character more autonomy. I even changed the ending so it becomes more an act of revenge, a statement of independence.”



Penélope Cruz and Asier Flores in *Pain and Glory*, 2019. Photograph: Sony Pictures Classics/Manolo Pavon/Allstar

The *Human Voice* is also Almodóvar's first work in English. Though he speaks the language fluently enough, most of his answers to my questions slide eventually into Spanish; a translator sitting with him in Madrid picks up the slack. "I felt if the text was in Spanish, it would feel much more melodramatic," he says. "Our language is warmer. The words when spoken in Spanish almost burn. English introduces a certain distance."

He was nervous, he says, about not working in his mother tongue. "But Tilda was the key. Her presence, her faith in me – it was all down to her talent that I still felt I was the same person in English that I am in Spanish. And she had a complete knowledge of my work!" He sounds touched, almost bashful. "I didn't realise she knew it so well."

Swinton tells me later by email that *Women on the Verge* was her introduction to Almodóvar. "I think the shot that truly did it for me was Julieta Serrano on the back of the motorbike in the chase sequence in the tunnel, with her wig blown backwards into a candy floss profile. The combination of Johnny Guitar, Ray Cooney, Jean Cocteau and the Beano blew my mind right there. I almost certainly saw it at the great Lumiere cinema on St Martin's Lane. It was 1988, I think: that was the year we were

planning to shoot Derek Jarman's War Requiem and developing [The Last of England](#). During the 1980s and 1990s, Pedro felt like a Spanish cousin to Derek and those of us working in underground and queer cinema in London at the time."

I was under no illusion that there were precious few gingery, boyish, angular, Scottish Anglophone freaks in his circus

Tilda Swinton

Actor and director had seen one another over the years at what Swinton calls "shy-makingly awkward Big Cine events. We were often the two standing on the periphery near each other, looking out at the glittering throng, not saying anything but occasionally catching each other's eye and giggling." The possibility of working together felt like a far-fetched dream. "I once plucked up the nerve to suggest to him that I could always either learn Spanish or play a mute, but I had little real hope. I was under no illusion that there were precious few gingery, boyish, angular, Scottish anglophone freaks in his circus."

What she found when she arrived on set was exactly what she had relished in his films all these years. "I've had the privilege several times in my life of stepping into a frame the signature of which I already know very well – Béla Tarr's, for example, or Wes Anderson's or Apichatpong Weerasethakul's – and it's a trip. In Pedro's case, his colours, his environments, his gestures, his people are so recognisable, so particular, that I found it a leap of faith to bring myself over the threshold." Were there any choices of his that she found surprising? "Working with him was in many ways supremely *unsurprising*," she says. "I feel I've been watching his work for so long and know the song of his sensibility so well by now that it was a little like stepping into a foregone conclusion."



Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown, 1988. Photograph: El Deseo/Allstar

Almodóvar's experience of Swinton was almost the opposite. "Tilda is tremendously curious and adventurous. What I didn't know is that she has her own individual way of working, her own system. When I gave her instructions, she would think aloud about the way to do things. I've never worked in that way with anyone before."

Nor have either of them ever made anything under such restrictive circumstances. All things considered, Almodóvar did not have too punishing a lockdown. He [explained](#) last month to the New York Times that changes in his personal life had left him better equipped to handle the isolation. "I've become more reclusive over the last 15 years – I'm still interested in what's going on, but I've decided to give up the physical, sexual and chemical excitements – and that's why quarantine didn't take me by surprise."

When I gave Tilda instructions, she'd think aloud how to do things. I've never worked in that way with anyone before

Pedro Almodóvar

In the early stages last spring, he wrote several [extended online diary entries](#) in which the unstable present intersected poignantly with the past. He wrote

of his conversations with Sean Connery, whom he had met at a festival, and who later phoned him after seeing his 2002 film [Talk to Her](#). Almodóvar also reflected on the ways in which he felt that he and Antonio Banderas had been manipulated and exploited by Madonna during the shooting of her 1991 documentary [In Bed with Madonna](#) (AKA Truth Or Dare). He wrote, too, of his lockdown viewing habits, especially the films of “my beloved” Brian de Palma, to whom he pays homage in *The Human Voice* with several overhead shots that make Swinton’s blatantly artificial apartment, housed as it is within a giant film studio, look like a blueprint.

When it came to making the short last July, the cast and crew were subject to strict social distancing restrictions and regular testing. What was it like to be shooting a film while others were administering the last rites to cinema?



Swinton in *The Human Voice*. Photograph: Iglesias Mas/El Deseo D.A. S.L.U.

“The experience, for all of us, of stepping back into a studio in July, all masked up and scrupulously safe and sound, was a very important one,” says Swinton. “To be working, to be making a film for the cinema, at a time when so many people were wondering if that would ever be possible again, was exhilarating. We proved to ourselves the heady fact that we can still work, even under this pandemic; it does not need to rob us of everything we can

cherish. For all of us who worked on this film in our studio in Madrid this summer, it was like an act of resolute and celebratory faith in cinema.”

It seems important to both actor and director, too, that *The Human Voice* should be seen on the big screen wherever possible. Don’t forget that it was Almodóvar who led the charge against streaming when he was [jury president](#) at the Cannes film festival in 2017 – the year that two Netflix productions, Bong Joon Ho’s [Okja](#) (that starred Swinton) and Noah Baumbach’s [The Meyerowitz Stories](#), were in competition. (Neither won any prizes.) “I’ll be fighting for one thing that I’m afraid the new generation is not aware of,” Almodóvar said at the time. “It’s the capacity of the hypnosis of the large screen for the viewer.”

Swinton’s faith in cinema remains similarly undimmed. “The screen projects I am developing are all, bar none, intended for the big screen,” she tells me. And the directors she is working with “are not ready yet to give up making that intention good”. She has quite the roll-call of pandemic-delayed movies coming up. Anderson’s [The French Dispatch](#), also starring Frances McDormand and Timothée Chalamet, was set to debut at Cannes last year until the festival was cancelled; it has been confirmed instead for this July’s festival, where it will likely be joined in competition by another of Swinton’s films, [Memoria](#), which is the first English-language feature by Weerasethakul (winner of the Palme d’Or in 2010 for [Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives](#)).

Also ready is Joanna Hogg’s [The Souvenir Part II](#), where she once again plays the mother of her real-life daughter, Honor Swinton Byrne. And she kept busy during lockdown shooting yet another movie with Hogg: [The Eternal Daughter](#), a ghost story filmed in Wales. Meanwhile, she recently finished making [Three Thousand Years of Longing](#), with Idris Elba and Mad Max director George Miller.

“I think,” Swinton emails, “one of the most striking things about the last 13 months is how unanimously society as a whole – not just cine-nuts like us – have been craving the big-screen experience.” She hits caps lock for emphasis: “FILM FOREVER and everywhere, wide and wild. As it says on

the bottom of Hollywood contracts: Through the universe in perpetuity. Amen.”

The Human Voice is in cinemas for one night only on 19 May. [Click here for tickets.](#)

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Experience](#)Life and style

Experience: I'm allergic to water

When I shower, I feel a tingling. Then it progresses to a gnawing, itching feeling, as if there was something chewing on the inside of my skin



Rachel Warwick: 'Even crying is a problem for me.' Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

Rachel Warwick: 'Even crying is a problem for me.' Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

Rachel Warwick

Fri 14 May 2021 05.00 EDT

I loved swimming when I was a child. I would go to the pool every week and could be in there for hours. But when I was about 12, I noticed a change. After being in water, I felt itchy. Initially, it was just one of those things you don't think about, but it got worse throughout my teens, to the point where it was more like a nettle rash, along with itching and burning. I thought I should probably see someone about it.

When I went to the doctor, they just brushed it off. They told me to change my soap and that it was probably nothing. But the burning sensation worsened. I was referred to another doctor who knew about this condition called aquagenic urticaria, which is a reaction the skin has to coming into contact with water. It's incredibly rare – [only about 100 cases have been recorded in medical literature](#) – but I was told I had it.

The doctor advised me to limit my showers to one a week. When I do have a shower, I feel a tingling under the skin after a couple of minutes. Then it progresses to a gnawing, itching feeling, as if there is something chewing on the inside of my skin. It starts to burn and hives appear, and it feels as if my skin is swelling up. Depending on how much contact I've had, it can take up to two hours for the skin to calm down again. I try to manage with spot washes instead, using distilled witch hazel.

I was also told I should avoid rain. I had to start wearing coats to protect my skin when I was out, especially if the forecast was bad. And if it does start raining while I'm out, I have to get home as quickly as possible.

Even crying is a problem for me. If I do cry, it makes my skin hot, itchy and swollen, so I look as if I've had loads of Botox. My eyes seem to have no liquid in them; the lids swell up and it feels as if they are made of sandpaper.

There is no cure for aquagenic urticaria and while it can be managed, there is no telling what will work for any individual with the condition. I do what I can – I drink a lot of milk to avoid contact with water, my husband does the washing-up and I've tried simple things such as changing the temperature of the water in the shower or not using soap – but nothing improves it. I've tried taking strong antihistamines, too, but they just made me sleepy.

A German TV company who had heard about my condition paid for me to fly out to Berlin to an allergy centre: some of the medications they use have worked for other people with the condition, but are not available here. I hoped it might help, but it turned out to be a wasted journey: I tried to ask questions, but time constraints meant it was virtually impossible to get anything answered. Once the cameras stopped rolling, I would have had to pay for my own treatment, at a cost of about £1,000 a month. There was no way I could afford that.

Thankfully, my situation is not life-threatening. For others, it is; I know of people who have had to go to A&E several times a year because they can't breathe. With mine it's mostly just sore, ugly and exhausting.

[Experience: a maggot hatched from my head](#)
[Read more](#)

I wish people were a bit kinder about it. I've had people laugh at me and tell me, "That's impossible" or that I'm making it up. They say things like: "But we're made up of water – how can you be allergic to it?" We don't have the answer for that yet. I just know that I am.

I've joined an internet group for fellow sufferers and I also run an awareness-raising group [on Facebook](#). There are about 1,000 members, so while the condition is still incredibly rare, it's probably more common than doctors realise.

I do still swim occasionally – it's just a case of dealing with the repercussions. On holiday, when it's hot, I start sweating, which makes me itch, then I'll see the pool and want to go in. And if I'm already itching, why not? But afterwards, when I'm covered in red splotches, I get horrible looks.

I would really like it if more research was done, so that we could finally have something that might help. Even if it's just trials, I would be more than happy to take part. I would love to swim without pain again one day.

As told to Daniel Dylan Wray

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Documentary films

‘It’s impossible to take your eyes off this infinitely dear face’: the startling film about Stalin’s funeral

Crafted from footage locked for years in an archive, Sergei Loznitsa’s *State Funeral* focuses on the motivations of the mourners who lived under the brutal regime



‘You are overwhelmed with sorrow’ ... a clip from *State Funeral*.
Photograph: YouTube

‘You are overwhelmed with sorrow’ ... a clip from *State Funeral*.
Photograph: YouTube

[Alex von Tunzelmann](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 03.00 EDT

“At 21.50, due to cardiovascular and respiratory failure, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin died,” intones an announcer. A woman takes off her hat, on the verge of tears. A handsome youth in a military uniform stares stoically at his feet. One middle-aged man glances self-consciously at the camera, as if to check it is still watching him, before looking down again. Again and again, our focus is drawn to faces in the crowds all across the Soviet Union. Not all are reverent. Some people shuffle, chat, chew, smoke, even half-smile.

The broadcasters’ praise for Stalin becomes ever more ludicrous: “We knew he was the best on our planet ... It’s impossible to take your eyes off this infinitely dear face. Your eyes are full of tears, you hold your breath, you are overwhelmed with sorrow shared by millions, hundreds of millions of people.”

But is that right? As the focus keeps returning to individuals, the film asks us to consider how each of them really felt.

Screening on Mubi and showing in selected UK cinemas from 21 May, [State Funeral](#) is an extraordinary documentary constructed by the Ukrainian director [Sergei Loznitsa](#) from largely unseen footage of Stalin’s funeral in March 1953. It was supposed to be a very different film. The footage was shot for an official production entitled The Great Farewell. It was meant to glorify Stalinism, not to highlight the individuality of those who lived under it.



People across the Soviet Union paid their respects to Stalin – sincerely or otherwise.

Yet the subject proved awkward at a time when the leading figures in the footage were locked in a power struggle. Lavrentiy Beria, Stalin's deputy, is seen here side by side with Soviet leaders who would have him arrested a few months later. Beria was executed with a bullet to the head in December 1953. Nikita Khrushchev, who emerged as the leader, embarked on a programme of "de-Stalinisation". The Great Farewell was canned and would not be seen until after the fall of the Soviet Union, in December 1991.

To create a new version with a distinctly critical slant, Loznitsa went to the Russian State Documentary Film and Photo Archive at Krasnogorsk, just outside Moscow. How did he gain access to the raw footage, which was considered so sensitive for so long? "It was very simple," he says. "I just asked the director of the archive and they were very open. It's amazing that this idea hadn't occurred to anyone before."

It's very surprising that the Soviet Union has always been regarded as an atheist society

The archive had 40 hours of footage, in colour and black and white. There was also 24 hours of original radio broadcasts, plus recordings of the

eulogies. Lithuanian postproduction and image-restoration experts cleaned up the old footage, returning it to a brilliant sharpness. The sound designer Vladimir Golovnitskiy pieced together a soundtrack mixing archive recordings with new sound work, giving the often silent images a sense of life. The effect is startling. State Funeral feels unsettlingly fresh.

There will be a familiarity to this material for audiences who saw Armando Iannucci's dark satire [The Death of Stalin](#) (2017). Loznitsa loved that film: "As a genre piece, it's great, it's wonderful," he says. "Iannucci's film is a translation of a historical event into contemporary language." That comedy and this documentary would make a fascinating, if macabre, double bill. Despite their obvious differences, they share a theme: the relentless terror and irrationality of totalitarianism – and how people function around it.

From the beginning, Stalin cultivated his own image and myth. He built a quasi-religious cult around Lenin, who had died in 1924, that probably would have horrified Lenin and certainly horrified many of his fellow Communists. "It's very surprising that the Soviet Union has always been regarded as an atheist society," says Loznitsa.



'The ideology is still there. The system is still there' ... Sergei Loznitsa.
Photograph: Jalal Morchidi/EPA-EFE

At first, official imagery depicted Lenin as Stalin's teacher. In the early 30s, the iconography shifted, so that the two were shown as equals. By 1935, Stalin was the star, with Lenin relegated to the background. Stalin obsessively controlled images of himself: he was sensitive about the smallpox scars on his face, his short left arm and his diminutive stature. He preferred portraits where he was shown embracing children, reinforcing his image as a loving father to the Soviet Union. (In reality, he was a terrible father, abandoning some of his children and making the rest miserable. When his son Yakov survived a suicide attempt, Stalin is said to have responded: "He can't even shoot straight.")

In State Funeral, though, we glimpse just how widespread and effective this propaganda was. While Loznitsa has selected snippets of footage in which mourners smirk, chat or look bored, there is plenty of convincing grief here, too. Eyes are downcast; shoulders slumped. Many weep as if they really have lost a beloved father. Did they genuinely love him? Or did they feel they had to be *seen* to love him?

Inevitably, much is left out. We do not see events in Trubnaya Square, Moscow, after Stalin's death was announced. A bottleneck formed as people crowded on their way to see the leader lying in state. In the resulting crush, at least 109 people were killed; unofficial estimates suggested many more died. "Documentary film-makers, especially those of us who work with archive footage, always find ourselves in a difficult situation, because we can only show the things that were actually shot," says Loznitsa. "If we think of all the victims of the regime, the stampede was yet another tragic element of this enormous tragedy that occurred." There may be footage of Trubnaya Square, he says: "Perhaps it is still classified in some secret KGB archive. We tried, but we couldn't find it."

Loznitsa's film has no narration or captioning (apart from the English subtitles). A title card at the end acknowledges the millions murdered and persecuted under Stalin's rule. After all that has gone before, the words in red on black have a tremendous impact – but there is an ambiguity that is open to criticism. "What is lost in the balance, of course, is context," [wrote Masha Gessen in the New Yorker](#). "Ordinary viewers, whether American or Russian, often won't know what they're seeing." If you *do* know what you

are seeing and not seeing, there is an incredibly sinister slant to all of this – and the fact it is not didactic perhaps makes it even more powerful.



He sought to portray himself as the country's father figure, despite being a terrible father. Photograph: YouTube

The film was released in Russia just before the pandemic hit. The reaction from audiences was divided into two types, Loznitsa says: "There are people who say how terrible, how awful – the whole spectacle is so awful. Another reaction is: 'What a great person Stalin was!' Some people see it as a great film about a great leader. As for this intertitle [title card] at the end that states otherwise, they say: 'Never mind, we can just ignore this text: the film-maker didn't know what he was doing.'"

In the context of modern Russia, Loznitsa's film is provocative. "Perhaps at this point it doesn't really matter that much which particular name is placed on top of the pyramid," Loznitsa says, referring to Lenin's tomb in Red Square, Moscow – a tomb Stalin shared from 1953 until 1961 and in which his body is interred with great ceremony at the end of this film. "The ideology is still there. The system is still there."

There may be many ways to watch this footage. For anyone interested in the Soviet Union or totalitarianism generally, though, *State Funeral* is

unmissable.

Fallen Idols: Twelve Statues That Made History by Alex von Tunzelmann (Headline, £20), which includes a chapter on Stalin, is published on 8 July. To support the Guardian, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2021.05.14 - Opinion

- The online safety bill will show just how blurred the boundaries of free speech are
- The violence that began at Jerusalem's ancient holy sites is driven by a distinctly modern zeal
- Remaking Myanmar's devastated economy is the key for a future democracy
- If people don't get paid to self-isolate, UK Covid cases could rise again

[Opinion](#)Online abuse

The online safety bill will show just how blurred the boundaries of free speech are

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Ofcom and big tech will be told to do more, but do we want them to decide who's allowed to say what



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Fri 14 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Consequences matter. If there was one clear message from football's [temporary boycott](#) of social media earlier this month, in protest at the torrent of online hate experienced disproportionately by black players, that was it.

The former England striker Ian Wright has [said](#) that he'd almost given up reporting the vile stuff he receives daily because nothing ever seemed to happen to the perpetrators. "It makes you feel very dehumanised. You feel like there's nothing you can do, you're helpless," he said. So two cheers, at least, for the inclusion in this week's [Queen's speech](#) of a long-delayed [online safety bill](#) aimed at holding big tech more accountable. Who wouldn't agree with the culture secretary Oliver Dowden's desire to rid social media of what he [called](#) "the bile and the threats"?

[Online safety bill 'a recipe for censorship', say campaigners](#)
[Read more](#)

For all the good social media brings, it has also created unrivalled opportunities for the resentful, the bitter and the frankly sociopathic to reach

those they couldn't previously touch. Children have been groomed for sexual exploitation, terrorists radicalised, the gullible sucked into conspiracy theories, teenage girls coached to self-harm, and hate normalised on platforms that have faced too little by way of consequence. Unlike some of the straw men set up by this Queen's speech for ministers to knock down noisily, this problem is real. But as with too many of this government's grand plans, it's one thing to announce you're going to fix the internet, and another to actually do it.

The case for action is so overwhelming that even Silicon Valley's smarter players are actively lobbying for governments to step in and regulate them, like teenagers whose illicit party has been gatecrashed by some scary-looking characters and who just want an adult to step in and deal with the problem they unwittingly created. Facebook's vice-president for global affairs, Nick Clegg, has [long argued](#) that its job would be easier if "some of the sensitive decisions we have to make were instead taken by people who are democratically accountable to the people at large" not by a private company. Let someone else take the flak for deciding whether Donald Trump [should be banned](#) for inciting riots, or in what circumstances posting an exposed nipple is acceptable. Judging by this rather vague and in places contradictory bill, however, it won't be that easy.

[The government's proposals](#) require tech companies to curb the use of their platforms for illegal purposes, under threat of sanction from Ofcom. So far, so clear. But it also imposes a "duty of care" on the biggest companies to prevent activities that aren't necessarily illegal, but are potentially harmful – capable of causing "physical or psychological impact" – while simultaneously safeguarding the right to free expression, protecting political campaigners' right to argue their case online and avoiding taking sides in political arguments.

All of which sounds eminently sensible, until you try applying it all in practice. Dowden [ducked the question when asked](#) by ITV's Robert Peston whether calling gay men "tank-topped bumboys", as Boris Johnson once did in a newspaper column, should be outlawed online. But that's almost the easy bit.

To say that biological sex is real, and immutable, would be seen in some circles as transphobic hate speech, and in others as a perfectly reasonable statement of fact. Who decides what's harmful to whom when teenagers on TikTok are shocked and upset by very different things to their parents on Mumsnet? What about comments that aren't discriminatory but are obnoxious, stupid or exhausting enough to cause cumulative "psychological impacts" if you're swamped with them? Where does an individual's responsibility to walk away end and the platform's responsibility to stop people feeling they have to leave begin? And how can a site not take sides in political arguments where one party chooses a liar or a bigot for a leader, and the other doesn't?

Answering these questions will shape popular culture profoundly, making the still vacant position of the Ofcom chair – contenders for which reportedly include the former Daily Mail editor-in-chief [Paul Dacre](#) – very powerful indeed. But they will also require from tech executives the judgment of Solomon, or at the very least, editorial skills more usually demanded of the BBC and newspaper executives – who won't, incidentally, be covered by this bill. Online journalism is exempt in the interests of press freedom, but, interestingly, so is below-the-line comment by readers, meaning that what a person can write underneath a tabloid article about Meghan Markle may diverge sharply from what can be said about her on Twitter – or indeed in a student union debate, where a [separate free speech bill](#) will guarantee the right of controversialists to sue for compensation if they're no-platformed by universities.

What's the guiding principle here, the one rule that makes the boundaries of free speech clear to everyone? There isn't one, partly because Dowden is right that in a democracy there are some things politicians shouldn't dictate, and partly because setting hard-and-fast rules on this stuff is like nailing jelly to a moving wall. Yet the success of this bill depends in some ways on pretending that there is; that deep down we know what's right, and that social media companies therefore have the power to fix things, if only they're threatened with the right stick. Well, maybe. But if not, then the story of regulating big tech may continue to be one of a shrinking circle of people passing the hot potato endlessly, each one desperately hoping the music doesn't stop with them.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[OpinionIsrael](#)

The violence that began at Jerusalem's ancient holy sites is driven by a distinctly modern zeal

[Yair Wallach](#)

The Israeli right's urge to take the Temple Mount threatens to turn 2,000 years of Judaism on its head



Palestinian medics evacuate a wounded person after clashes in Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque compound on 10 May 2021. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

Palestinian medics evacuate a wounded person after clashes in Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque compound on 10 May 2021. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 13 May 2021 12.11 EDT

On Monday, an [apocalyptic video](#) from Jerusalem began to circulate on social media. In the background, it showed a large fire raging on the site Muslims call al-Aqsa or al-Haram al-Sharif, and Jews call the Temple Mount. A tree was ablaze next to al-Aqsa mosque (some blamed Israeli police stun grenades, others blamed Palestinians shooting fireworks, perhaps aiming at Jewish worshippers). Below, the large plaza of the Western Wall was full with young Jewish Israelis, identified with the religious Zionist right, celebrating “Jerusalem Day” (marking the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967). They were cheering at the sight of the fire, singing an anthem of vengeance popular in extreme-right circles. The lyrics are the words of Samson, just before he pulled down the pillars of the Temple in Gaza: “O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!” The Israeli teenagers, visibly ecstatic, jumped up and down and shouted: “May their name be effaced!”

This is not the first time that the [holy sites](#) have been ground zero for a major violent escalation in the conflict, and it is therefore tempting to interpret this vengeful frenzy as merely the latest eruption of an atavistic devotion to ancient stones, one bound to spiral out of control. But this is a misleading story: the political significance of these places – and their very meaning – has changed dramatically over the past century, particularly for Jewish Israelis.

Judaism, as it developed in antiquity and the middle ages, is a religion shaped by the absence of the Temple – destroyed by the Romans in 70CE. And while Jewish prayers speak about yearning for its reestablishment, the biblical practices associated with the Temple (such as animal sacrifice) are antithetical to the praxis and spirit of Judaism. The Western Wall (part of the supporting wall of Herod’s Temple) is sacred as a remnant – a symbol of the destruction that shaped Judaism. The current site has been venerated by Jews since the 16th century. By the 19th century, it was the most important Jewish site of pilgrimage and worship, but for the Zionist movement, it represented an ideological conundrum.

The modern Jewish national movement, calling for a return to Zion, wanted to reclaim the wall. From the early 20th century, Zionist leaders called to “redeem” it by purchasing the houses in its vicinity and paving a plaza for worshippers. They sought to transform it into a monument of national

revival. But the wall itself, as a remnant of the destroyed Temple's compound, was a symbol of ruin, and nothing could change that fact. For Judaism, the wall was a constant reminder of God's exile – an exile that the modern Zionist promise to “ingather the Jewish Diasporas” could not overcome. This simple and insurmountable contradiction has never ceased to haunt the Zionist engagement with the wall.

This ambivalence was noticeable in early Zionist attitudes. The wall was largely absent from early Zionist iconography, and appeared (if at all) as a metaphor for destruction, contrasted with symbols of Zionist revival such as the agricultural colonies. The Labour-dominated Zionist movement sought to harness Jewish religious symbols in favour of secular nationalism, but was strongly opposed to ideas of the reconstruction of the Temple. So much that, as historian Hillel Cohen revealed, in 1931 the Zionist Hagana militia murdered a Jew who planned to blow up the Islamic sites of the Haram.

After the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, Israeli officials were in direct control of the holy sites. They pledged to maintain the status quo on the Haram, which remained under effective Palestinian Muslim control. When it came to the Western Wall, the desire to make the site into a national Jewish monument was finally achieved. Within days, the Mughrabi Quarter, a medieval neighbourhood that stood next to the wall, was entirely depopulated and razed to the ground to make room for a huge plaza. From a hidden wall, seen only from close proximity, it became a monumental stage, used not only for prayer but also for state and military ceremonies.

But the transformation did not resolve the basic contradictions embedded in the wall, and indeed has only served to accentuate them. Now much more than before, the wall's liminal position as a sharp border between Jews (below) and Muslims (above), between ruin (the wall) and redemption (the unattainable Temple Mount), was rendered visible. The wall remains a memorial of destruction, a site of absence, while the Muslim sites loom from above.

After 1967, the secular Labour movement lost its position as the Zionist vanguard. Religious settlers claimed the language of Zionism as they spearheaded the colonisation of the occupied territories. The secular-Zionist project of “normalisation” – making Jews a territorial nation “like any other”

– was overtaken from within by those who continued the colonising mission, but interpreted the biblical promise of the land literally as manifest destiny. In that context, the holy sites – now under Israeli control – assumed a new meaning, and became a new frontier. Some religious Zionists were no longer content with the Western Wall, given that the Temple Mount was within reach.

In the 1980s, there were two attempts by Jewish militant groups to blow up the Islamic sites on the Haram. Since then, the Temple Mount Faithful, calling for Israel to assert Jewish control of the Haram, has grown from a tiny fringe group to a movement with political backing. The Temple Institute in the Old City, funded partly by the Israeli government, produces ritual objects for the Temple, in anticipation of its reconstruction, while [performances](#) of simulated ritual sacrifices by priests in white robes are held annually before Passover, in close proximity to the Haram al-Sharif. Such practices represent no less than a reinvention of Judaism – given that it has been shaped for 2,000 years by the Temple’s destruction. These activities remain minority pursuits; more popular are frequent group visits of religious Jews to the Mount, despite Palestinian protests. Orthodox rabbis had long forbidden visits to the compound because of its sanctity. But more and more rabbinic authorities have lifted the ban, and these visits assume ritual significance, even though, formally, Jewish prayer remains forbidden, in keeping with the status quo.

In the last few years, Jewish supremacism has emerged as a hegemonic ideology that legitimises Israeli control over the entire country, from the river to the sea. For the Israeli radical right, Israel’s inability or unwillingness to take complete control over the Haram is a symptom of “weak sovereignty”. This frustration accentuates the theological insufficiency of the Wall – as the site of permanent ruin and absence – and turns the attention to the Temple Mount.

The ongoing Palestinian presence in al-Aqsa Mosque therefore appears as the last significant obstacle to Israeli domination – the site has huge mobilising force among ordinary Palestinians who come to defend it in their thousands in times such as this, and it is no surprise that Hamas sought to associate itself with its defence, through the [firing of rockets from Gaza](#).

Palestinians remain in control of the country's holiest place for Muslims and Jews, not through military force or diplomatic negotiations, but simply by continuing to be there, with the moral authority that confers.

The Haram al-Sharif thus represents a symbolic challenge to Jewish-Israeli hegemony that is far more significant than the weakened Palestinian Authority or Hamas's rockets. This may explain the violence of the Israeli police in [storming the mosque](#), and the high number of injuries among Muslim worshippers this week – just as it explains the crowd of young Israelis singing genocidal songs of vengeance as fires burn on the Haram al-Sharif. But what has gone largely unremarked is the extent to which these events signal the emergence of a version of Judaism that fetishises rock and soil – and pursues a fantasy of redemption in the physical takeover of the Temple's site. For now, such an apocalyptic scenario is still unlikely. But already the events of this week – with the country engulfed by an unprecedented wave of vigilante violence that threatens to explode into civil war – are a demonstration of how dangerous this trend has already become.

- Yair Wallach is a senior lecturer in Israeli studies and head of the Centre for Jewish Studies at SOAS, the University of London

[Opinion](#) Myanmar

Remaking Myanmar's devastated economy is the key for a future democracy

[Thant Myint-U](#)

Dictatorship must be resisted, but that's not enough. Solving the country's economic crisis could transform society



Protesters against the military coup in Pandale, a village in south Myanmar.
Photograph: Dawei Watch/AFP/Getty Images

Protesters against the military coup in Pandale, a village in south Myanmar.
Photograph: Dawei Watch/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 14 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Myanmar is facing an economic and humanitarian disaster of epic proportions. There is an urgent need to protect the poorest and most

vulnerable and provide assistance in a way that doesn't entrench dictatorship. Equally important is to use this crisis to transform Myanmar's incredibly unequal and singularly exploitative political economy. It's the key to democratic change. It's also the key to creating a fairer, as well as a freer and more prosperous, society.

[Myanmar journalists and activists arrested in Thailand after fleeing across border](#)

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The army's [coup d'état](#) in February has been followed by strikes and protests, and intense repression. The army has not been able to consolidate its coup and has instead unwittingly unleashed revolutionary movements determined to end the military's role in politics once and for all. Years of turbulence lie ahead.

Meanwhile, the economy has collapsed, with tens of millions of people descending fast into extreme poverty and the World Food Programme estimating that [3.4 million people](#) will be unable to feed themselves properly within the next six months. The healthcare system has also collapsed, jeopardising the lives of many more, including the several hundred thousand people dependent on TB and HIV drugs and the 950,000 infants [normally inoculated](#) each year against measles, polio and other diseases. There is now next to no Covid-19 testing and no possibility of large-scale vaccination.

The proximate cause of the unfolding catastrophe is the coup and its aftermath but understanding the history of Myanmar's political economy is critical for thinking about what may come next.

Myanmar's economy under British rule was based on the immigration of Indian labourers and the export of primary commodities. After independence in 1948, politics was dominated by the left and efforts to overturn the colonial legacies. But in the late 1980s a new army junta ended the "[Burmese way to socialism](#)", creating new markets, in particular around extractive industries tied to China's industrial revolution next door. Taxation and social services were practically non-existent. Inequality skyrocketed and a mix of climate change and massive land confiscations drove millions to Thailand in search of work. In the uplands, alongside a patchwork of army

battalions, militia and ethnic minority forces, were money-making networks far richer than even the men with guns, including a [methamphetamine racket](#) said by the UN to be worth billions.

The political reforms of the past 10 years were not accompanied by any structural change to the economy. The army took a big step back from business, and liberalisation led to more foreign competition as well as growth in a few sectors such as tourism, property and telecoms. A small middle class emerged but most Myanmar people continued to live on the edge of violence and extreme poverty, including the most vulnerable: upland farmers, landless villagers, new urban slum-dwellers, people of South Asian descent and other minorities. The ethnic cleansing of the [Rohingya](#) in 2017 was unmatched in scale and brutality. But the Myanmar state has long failed many of its peoples.

With the pandemic came an economic shock that sent an already fragile economy into a tailspin, the result of lockdowns and disruptions to foreign trade. The garment sector, the country's one promising manufacturing industry, was brought to its knees. An international study last October found that [income poverty](#) (people making less than \$1.90 (£1.36) a day) had risen from 16% to 63% of the population. There was almost no state support.

Now in the aftermath of the coup, the economy is at a virtual standstill. A general strike coupled with the army's internet blockages have shut down much of the financial system, disrupting business and payroll payments worth the equivalent of billions of US dollars a month. With confidence plummeting and the central bank unwilling or unable to provide needed liquidity, families are hoarding as much cash as possible. It's difficult to imagine how ordinary people will survive these coming months, especially the rural poor, most of whom are landless and entirely dependent on casual work.

However, the army regime is likely to survive any economic downturn because Myanmar's system has never veered far from the one that grew up under past juntas and under the toughest possible western sanctions. The new businesses of the past decade, such as manufacturing, will wither, old ones, such as timber and mining, will gain renewed ground, and illicit ones

in the uplands, from narcotics to money-laundering and wildlife trafficking will flourish in the protracted instability to come.

Whatever happens, the international priority should be to ensure that Myanmar's poor and vulnerable communities are able to receive the assistance needed to stay alive, with special attention paid to children's inoculations. But this must be done with political skill, so as not to undermine chances for the radical political changes to government that the vast majority of people desperately want.

Today's revolutionary movements aim to cut revenues to the junta and are willing to pay a high economic cost. But a successful transition will come over years, not months, and it's important to identify the economic landscape best suited for democratic change. Measures to weaken the junta that inadvertently strengthen the hand of transnational criminal networks may lead not to state collapse but a mutated political order, one that will take generations to unwind.

Dictatorship must be resisted but democracy is not enough. Over recent months, a new generation of leaders have come to the fore and many have rejected the ethno-nationalism at the heart of Myanmar politics, seeking fresh alliances across racial, ethnic and religious divides. This is not only welcome but essential for any future success. But there should also be a focus on issues of inequality and underdevelopment, protecting the vulnerable now, while reimagining and mobilising around a fairer political economy of tomorrow.

- Thant Myint-U is the author of *The Hidden History of Burma: Race, Capitalism, and the Crisis of Democracy in the 21st Century* (Atlantic Books)

[OpinionCoronavirus](#)

If people don't get paid to self-isolate, UK Covid cases could rise again

[Sarah Reed](#) and [Mike Brewer](#)

The threat of new variants means a new approach is urgently needed to help those self-isolating stay off work



‘Given that a significant proportion of the population is still not fully vaccinated, controlling Covid-19 will rely on people who have or might have the virus getting tested and self-isolating.’ Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

‘Given that a significant proportion of the population is still not fully vaccinated, controlling Covid-19 will rely on people who have or might have the virus getting tested and self-isolating.’ Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

Fri 14 May 2021 04.00 EDT

The government has failed to provide adequate support for people self-isolating during the pandemic. Too many still fear they won't be able to afford time off work should they need to stay at home. Compliance with self-isolation has been worryingly low, with some surveys showing that only around a [half of people with Covid-19 symptoms](#) stick to the legal requirement to self-isolate. Evidence suggests that financial barriers are a key reason [people don't comply](#), but the government has failed to fix this blind spot by protecting people from lost earnings when they are required to isolate.

With social restrictions set to ease further, now is the time to address this critical flaw in the government's pandemic response. Any [failure to provide](#) vital self-isolation support could undermine the government's entire roadmap out of lockdown, putting paid to everything from the vaccine rollout to the expensive test-and-trace system. Given that a significant proportion of the population is still not fully vaccinated, controlling Covid-19 will rely on people who have or might have the virus getting tested and self-isolating. The [threat of new variants](#) and high infection rates globally means we cannot afford to be complacent. The population still needs to take self-isolation seriously, and they need to be supported financially to facilitate them in doing so.

The current level of statutory sick pay across the UK is just £96 a week. This covers only a quarter of the average worker's earnings, while [two million workers](#) earn less than the amount required to qualify, leaving the poorest in society without any means to support themselves should they need to self-isolate.

And while one-off £500 self-isolation payments have been introduced UK-wide, these payments are only available to people who qualify for benefits targeted at low-income families and research suggests [only one in eight workers](#) are eligible. This restrictive eligibility criteria, along with often confusing and difficult application processes, has resulted in an estimated two-thirds of [applications being rejected](#). The government has [increased funding](#) for local councils to provide practical and financial assistance to those self-isolating. But this support is discretionary and may be applied variably: it is by no means guaranteed for everyone who needs it.

Some who lose earnings while self-isolating can claim universal credit, but entitlements are small – currently only £412 a month for a single adult over 25 – and the five-week wait means applicants may struggle to make ends meet until their first payment comes in. The result is that people with no money in the bank are suddenly faced with a disappearing income because they have been told to stay at home.

These issues require an urgent new approach to the problem of how to pay people's wages while they self-isolate. The government took critical steps during the pandemic to protect incomes with the [furlough scheme](#), which we believe should now be adapted to allow employers to cover the lost wages of self-isolating employees, up to a capped amount. Alongside existing local support packages, such a pledge would help remove any financial imperative for people to work when they should be self-isolating.

If the cap remains as it is under the current furlough scheme (which is £2,500 a month, and would work out as £822 for a typical 10-day self-isolation period), three out of four workers would have their earnings fully replaced. Since the job retention scheme only applies to those with an employer, any self-employment income support should be modified so payments cover short periods of self-isolation rather than being paid in three-month lump sums as with furlough payments.

[Don't wait for government – UK scientists should conduct a Covid inquiry, now | Philip Ball](#)
[Read more](#)

If Covid-19 case numbers remain at a similar level to that in early April, we estimate that implementing this system would cost just £39m a month. This is equivalent to only 3% of the allocated [£1.25bn-a-month](#) test and trace budget for this year and next. The costs would grow if we see another exponential rise in cases, but this seems more affordable than other schemes the government has been willing to commit to – while the potential financial and health consequences of inaction are bleak.

That's why urgent action is needed, to right the wrong of the poor provision to date by the government for those required to self-isolate. It makes sense both economically and from a public health perspective to increase income

support: Covid-19 cases rise when people do not self-isolate, which [could drive areas](#) into another lockdown. This is an even more real concern with worrying news of the Indian variant [possibly leading to case spikes](#) in places such as Glasgow.

Test, trace and isolate [strategies work best](#) at containing Covid-19 when cases are relatively low and the system can keep up with spread. So now is the moment to finally get self-isolation support right and avoid the risk of further cases, deaths or lockdowns.

- Sarah Reed is senior fellow at the Nuffield Trust. Mike Brewer is chief economist at the Resolution Foundation

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2021.05.14 - Around the world

- [Ethiopia Rape is being used as weapon of war, say witnesses](#)
- [Tigray conflict 'Bodies are being eaten by hyenas; girls of eight raped': inside the Tigray conflict](#)
- [India Eighteen elephants found dead in forest reserve](#)
- [Havana syndrome US officials confirm 130 incidents of mysterious brain injury](#)

Global development

Rape is being used as weapon of war in Ethiopia, say witnesses

Ethiopian nun speaks of widespread horror she and colleagues are seeing on a daily basis inside the heavily isolated region of Tigray

- 'Bodies are left to be eaten by hyenas; girls as young as eight are being raped'



A Tigrayan refugee who was raped as she fled the conflict in Ethiopia. 'Rape is starting at the age of 8 and to the age of 72,' a nun reports. Photograph: Nariman El-Mofty/AP

A Tigrayan refugee who was raped as she fled the conflict in Ethiopia. 'Rape is starting at the age of 8 and to the age of 72,' a nun reports. Photograph: Nariman El-Mofty/AP

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[Tracy McVeigh](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Thousands of women and girls are being targeted by the deliberate tactic of using rape as a weapon in [the civil war that has erupted in Ethiopia](#), according to eyewitnesses.

In a rare account from inside the heavily isolated region of Tigray, where communications with the outside world are being deliberately cut off, an Ethiopian nun has spoken of the [widespread horror](#) she and her colleagues are seeing on a daily basis since a savage war erupted six months ago.

“Rape is starting at the age of 8 and to the age of 72. Many, many have been raped. This has all happened so quickly,” said the sister, who cannot be named to protect her security but is based in the regional capital of Mekelle.

“It is so widespread, I go on seeing it everywhere, thousands. This rape is in public, in front of family, husbands, in front of everyone. Their legs and their hands are cut, all in the same way.”

The northern area of Ethiopia, home to 5.6 million people, has been racked by civil war since the Nobel peace prize laureate, the prime minister, Abiy

Ahmed, sent the army in to oust the powerful regional government there on 4 November. The forces were joined by Eritrean troops, allied to Ahmed's government, in fighting against the Tigray People's Liberation Front. The conflict has led to thousands of people being displaced internally, as well as more than 63,000 people fleeing to bordering regions in east Sudan.



Displaced people who have taken refuge in a building under construction at Aksum University, in Shire, Tigray. Of 3 million people targeted to receive aid, only 347,000 have received it, the UN said. Photograph: Baz Ratner/Reuters

“For us, it’s so shocking. So sudden. We have a normal life, things are improving, health centres, lives and education programmes,” she said. “Then, as if in a day, there’s a fully fledged war. For the last three months now we are trying to feed 25,000 displaced people ... some are 120km away from Mekelle.

“[Rape is happening] wherever there are Eritrean or Ethiopian troops. Tragic. Every single woman. Not only once. It is intentional; it is deliberate. I am confident in that from what I am witnessing. Some 70,000 civilians are under attack. So much looting, fighting, raping. All targeting the civilians. The brutality, the killings, the harassing.

“This region has been closed off. Cut off from all support that people deserve. We are isolated, lonely, neglected. The young people are so scared.”

The conflict has plunged the region even further into severe food insecurity, and a deliberate military blockade of food risks mass starvation, a recent report by the [World Peace Foundation](#) warned. At least 5.2 million people are in need of food aid.

The UN has confirmed that military forces are impeding humanitarian access to parts of Tigray, and there have been reports of military forces from Eritrea working with Ethiopians to cut off critical aid routes.

[The Guardian view on the war in Ethiopia: Tigray's civilians need protection | Editorial](#)
[Read more](#)

In the UN's first statement confirming that aid was not getting through to people, the secretary general's spokesman, [Stéphane Dujarric](#), said on Wednesday that “blockades by military forces” had stopped humanitarian aid from reaching the areas where people were most in need and that the situation was “fluid and unpredictable”.

“Of the three million people targeted to receive emergency shelter and non-food items, only 347,000 people – that is, about 12% – had been reached since 3 May. With the start of the rainy season, our humanitarian colleagues warn that it is critical that aid agencies can provide minimal dignified shelter for the displaced,” the statement said.

Laetitia Bader, director for the Horn of Africa at Human Rights Watch, said the communications shutdown across the region was hampering efforts to document what was happening in Tigray.

“Since the beginning of this conflict, the warring parties have gone out of their way to make it extremely difficult to document the human rights abuses and humanitarian situation in real time. In the last three weeks, with the internet shutdown, it has become impossible.”

The head of the women's rights committee at the European parliament, Evelyn Regner, called this week for perpetrators to be called to account for the widespread sexual violence being used as a weapon of war in Tigray, saying lessons from the Rwandan genocide and the war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina have still not been learned.

[Ethiopia: 1,900 people killed in massacres in Tigray identified](#)
[Read more](#)

“Sexual violence against women and girls has been used as a weapon of war for centuries. Unfortunately, it is still the case in many conflicts throughout the world and the civil war in northern Ethiopia is yet another example of it. More than 500 women have formally reported sexual violence – but the toll is expected to be much higher,” she said.

“Sexual violence and rape are to be condemned and addressed by leaders worldwide, as President Biden already did. These atrocities have to come to an end and soldiers, as well as their commanders, involved in these acts have to be convicted.”

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, head of the UK charity Mary's Meals, which is supporting the nun and her fellow humanitarian workers and has launched an emergency appeal for Tigray, said: “The deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Tigray is terrifying. It would be hard to exaggerate the acute suffering of the people there and how bleak their future looks.

“We thank God for the sister, and all our amazing co-workers there, who are literally saving lives through their incredibly courageous efforts. The world might be understandably distracted by the pandemic right now but we surely we cannot just turn our backs on this enormous human catastrophe?”

The nun in Mekelle told the Guardian: “Everybody in the world should condemn the killing of civilians. People having to leave their loved homes and the sexual violence ... so many woman and girls raped.

“I would like to say to the world: they must not wait for another second. Everybody in the world must act, must condemn this.”

A [full piece](#) by the nun is online

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Rights and freedom](#)[Global development](#)

‘Bodies are being eaten by hyenas; girls of eight raped’: inside the Tigray conflict

A nun working in war-torn Tigray has shared her harrowing testimony of the atrocities taking place



An Ethiopian refugee from the Tigray conflict attends mass at a refugee camp in eastern Sudan. ‘We have 40 to 65 people sleeping in one room,’ says a nun working with people displaced by the war. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

An Ethiopian refugee from the Tigray conflict attends mass at a refugee camp in eastern Sudan. ‘We have 40 to 65 people sleeping in one room,’ says a nun working with people displaced by the war. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

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HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

[Tracy McVeigh](#)

Fri 14 May 2021 05.06 EDT

The Ethiopian nun, who has to remain anonymous for her own security, is working in Mekelle, Tigray's capital, and surrounding areas, helping some of the tens of thousands of people displaced by the fighting who have been streaming into camps in the hope of finding shelter and food. Both are in short supply. Humanitarian aid is being largely blocked and a wholesale crackdown is seeing civilians being picked off in the countryside, either shot or rounded up and taken to overcrowded prisons. She spoke to Tracy McVeigh this week.

“After the last few months I’m happy to be alive. I have to be OK. Mostly we are going out to the IDP [internally displaced people] camps and the community centres where people are. They are in a bad way.

“In comparison to the other places, Mekelle is much better, although I consider it chaotic as we have 40 to 65 people sleeping in one room. For 3,000 to 6,000 people, there are four toilets for men and four for women. Sanitation is very poor, water is not always available. Food and medicines ... they are difficult to find.

[Ethiopian patriarch pleads for international help to stop rape and genocide by government troops](#)

[Read more](#)

“People have been here for three or four months and still have no blankets, and the numbers of IDPs is increasing every day, maybe 100 come every day from the worst part of the region. So the demand does not match supply. The community, the people here, they are trying to help but they have very little to share themselves. No one can withdraw any money from the banks; there’s no businesses operating. But still, whatever people have, they share.

“It happened so quickly. For us, it’s so shocking. So sudden. We had a normal life, things were improving – health centres, lives and education programmes. We were reaching 24,000 children and had plans to expand the school feeding programme. But all that had to stop because of the coronavirus. Then as if in a day, there’s a fully fledged war. For the past three months now we are trying to feed 25,000 IDPs in about 23 centres; some are 75 miles away from Mekelle. Many, many have been raped.



Ethiopian soldiers at Mai Aini refugee camp, which houses people displaced by the Tigray conflict. Photograph: Eduardo Soteras/AFP/Getty

“There were some indicators late last year: the roads out were closed, the budget to this area had been cut and when we had the locust attacks, there was no support from central government. They were not allowing face masks for the schoolchildren. A lot of other humiliations were happening. So there was a lot of discrimination leading up to it, but war? War was so sudden.

“People are traumatised. Some of them have lost immediate family members. People are worried about where members of their family are. Some people are out in the bush. Their homes are occupied. People are worried, anxious, sad, angry. They are really worried about the future.

“I met an old person who had been displaced three times in their lifetime, all because of these ethnic wars, but for younger people, anyone aged 30, 40, this is all new. I’m 48 and I have never witnessed any war. It is very strange and very scary. It really puts you in darkness.

“When I think of our lives here a year ago, we had peace and signs of development in all areas, in water, communications systems. It was so inspiring, giving us hope. But now the hospitals have all been attacked, looted and destroyed.

“Now that feels like history. In just a few months.



A looted classroom at Ksanet junior secondary school, in Wukro, a transport hub north of Mekelle in March. Photograph: Eduardo Soteras/AFP/Getty

“In Mekelle the shelling has now stopped but it is still going on not far from us. The bodies are being left to be eaten by the hyenas, not even having the dignity of burial.

“Rape is happening to girls as young as eight and to women of 72. It is so widespread, I go on seeing it everywhere, thousands. This rape is in public, in front of family, husbands, in front of everyone. Their legs and their hands are cut, all in the same way.

['I saw people dying on the road': Tigray's traumatised war refugees](#)
[Read more](#)

“You wonder if the people doing this are human. I don't know who is training these people.

“Wherever there are Eritrean or Ethiopian troops. Tragic. Every single woman, not only once. It is intentional, deliberate. I am confident in that from what I am witnessing. There are 70,000 civilians under attack. So much looting, fighting, raping. All targeting the civilians. The brutality, the killings, the harassing.

“This region has been closed off. Cut off from all the support that people deserve. We are isolated, lonely, neglected. If the world is not moved to take action against such terribleness, you wonder why. This suffering is appalling.



A shell-damaged shop in Wukro in March. Since the shelling last November, the town has been patrolled by soldiers, first Eritreans, now Ethiopians, whose abuses fuel a steady flow of civilian casualties. Photograph: Eduardo Soteras/AFP/Getty

“I don’t know what is worse, to die in the bush, starving, or in jail or by gun. The young people are so scared.

“The world should condemn the killing of civilians. People having to leave their homes and the sexual violence – so many woman and girls raped.

“I would like to say to the world: in the 21st century there should be no one dying of hunger when the world can take action. Whoever can do this, they must not wait for another second. Everybody in the world must act, they should condemn this.

“I know it can be done. There has to be someone who can do it and do it fast.”

[Mary's Meals](#) is working closely with a trusted local partner in Tigray, providing 20,000 internally displaced people with food aid, serving daily meals at several schools across the region’s capital, Mekelle, which have been turned into temporary shelters for more than 150,000 destitute and traumatised people – including children who have lost their parents.

If you would like to donate to Mary's Meals Crisis in Ethiopia appeal
<https://www.marysmeals.org.uk/crisis-in-ethiopia>

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

India

Eighteen elephants found dead in Indian forest reserve

Lightning or poisoning cited as possible causes of deaths in protected area in Assam state



A veterinary team check the bodies of the elephants found in Nagaon district, Assam state. Photograph: Biju Boro/AFP/Getty Images

A veterinary team check the bodies of the elephants found in Nagaon district, Assam state. Photograph: Biju Boro/AFP/Getty Images

Agencies

Fri 14 May 2021 05.25 EDT

Authorities are trying to establish how 18 wild Asiatic elephants died in a remote corner of India's north-east.

The elephants, including five calves, were found dead in the protected Kondali forest reserve in the state of Assam, Jayanta Goswami, a wildlife official, told Associated Press. The forest guard reached the area on Thursday and found 14 elephants dead atop a hill and four at its bottom.

Forest officials and a local lawmaker, Jitu Goswami, told Agence France-Presse they believed the elephants died after lightning struck the forest. But Soumyadeep Datta, a prominent conservationist with the environmental activist group Nature's Beckon, said that was unlikely, based on images shared on social media.

“Poisoning could be behind the death of the elephants,” Datta said. “We have to wait for the autopsy report, which the forest department will do soon.”

A team of vets and officials headed to the site on Friday together with Assam's forests and environment minister, Parimal Shuklabaidya. The reserve is in Nagaon district, 95 miles east of Gauhati, the state capital.

India is home to nearly 30,000 elephants, about 60% of the wild Asian elephant population. An estimated 6,000 or more wild Asiatic elephants live in Assam. They often come out of the forests in search of food.

Conservationists have urged the government to prevent people's encroachment into elephant territory and to establish free corridors for the elephants to move between forests safely. In recent years wild elephants have entered villages, destroyed crops and even killed people.

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[CIA](#)

US officials confirm 130 incidents of mysterious Havana syndrome brain injury

US diplomats, spies and defence officials have reported serious symptoms, some within the past few weeks



A US flag flies at the embassy in Cuba, where cases of Havana syndrome were first reported. Photograph: Desmond Boylan/AP

A US flag flies at the embassy in Cuba, where cases of Havana syndrome were first reported. Photograph: Desmond Boylan/AP

[*Julian Borger*](#) in Washington

Thu 13 May 2021 17.25 EDT

There have been more than 130 incidents of unexplained brain injury known as Havana syndrome among US diplomats, spies and defence officials, some

of them within the past few weeks, it has been reported.

The [New York Times](#) said three CIA officers had reported serious symptoms since December, following overseas assignments, requiring outpatient treatment at the Walter Reed military hospital in Washington. One episode was within the past two weeks.

The reported number of cases is about 70 more than had previously been acknowledged.

Mark Zaid, who represents some former officials afflicted by Havana syndrome, said he had been contacted by more people who believed they had been affected.

“The numbers are definitely increasing,” he said.

[Havana syndrome: NSA officer’s case hints at microwave attacks since 90s](#)
[Read more](#)

US officials confirmed that there continued to be fresh cases under review but cautioned that the publicity given to [previous Havana syndrome](#) cases had led some people to reinterpret symptoms they were suffering and wonder whether they may have been victims of some form of attack they had not previously suspected. So the number of new cases did not necessarily reflect the number of new incidents.

In December, the [National Academy of Sciences](#) published a report saying that the brain injuries suffered by US government employees in Cuba and China were most likely the result of some form of directed energy.

Cheryl Rofer, a former chemist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, has questioned the study’s conclusions, and the claim by victims and some experts that some kind of microwave weapon developed by an adversary is responsible for Havana syndrome.

“The evidence for microwave effects of the type categorized as Havana syndrome is exceedingly weak,” Rofer [wrote in Foreign Policy](#). “No proponent of the idea has outlined how the weapon would actually work. No

evidence has been offered that such a weapon has been developed by any nation. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, and no evidence has been offered to support the existence of this mystery weapon.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Headlines thursday 13 may 2021

- [Middle East Israel's army drafts Gaza ground operation plan as mob violence escalates](#)
- ['All I saw was fire' Rockets shatter sense of safety in Tel Aviv](#)
- [Tel Aviv TV shows 'lynch' mob attacking motorist](#)
- [Analysis Weapons boast may come back to haunt Hamas](#)

[Israel](#)

Israel draws up plan for Gaza ground attack as mob violence spreads

Drafts being prepared for senior Israeli military figures and politicians to consider

01:57

Journalist reports live from Gaza as neighbouring building hit by Israel airstrike – video

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem and [Harriet Sherwood](#)

Thu 13 May 2021 09.20 EDT

Israel's military is drafting a plan for a possible ground operation in Gaza, as it presses ahead with a fierce air offensive on the enclave and as Hamas, the militant group that runs Gaza, fires volleys of rockets deep into [Israel](#).

Meanwhile, racist mob attacks have continued to spread through Israel [in the worst Arab-Jewish chaos for years](#). Overnight on Wednesday, far-right Jewish mobs took to the streets across the country searching for Arabs, while there were reports of attempted shootings as Palestinian citizens of Israel clashed with police.

British Airways joined several US airlines in suspending flights to Ben Gurion airport on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. "The safety and security of our colleagues and customers is always our top priority, and we continue to monitor the situation closely," BA said. Other flights to Israel were cancelled or diverted to an airport near Eilat in the south of the country. It appeared to be the first time Israel had used Ramon as an alternative to Ben Gurion due to conflict.

The ground attack plans, which are in their initial stages and have not been approved, would be presented on Thursday to the military heads, who would

consider whether to submit them to Israel's government, an army spokesperson said.

Plans to intensify the operation came as Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, told cabinet colleagues the country had rejected a Hamas proposal for a ceasefire. The offer of a truce was made on Wednesday via the Russian foreign ministry, which quoted a senior Hamas official as saying that the Islamist group was ready to halt attacks on a "mutual basis", [Ynetnews reported](#).

Early on Thursday, thousands of Israelis went into shelters after warning sirens sounded in Tel Aviv, the economic capital in the middle of the country, and also – for the first time since the unrest escalated this week – in the Jezreel valley in the north.

02:18

Israel-Gaza violence: flattened buildings, rockets and communal unrest – video

There was no immediate word of any casualties from the pre-dawn salvo, and later reports suggested the sirens in the north were false alarms.

The Israeli military has carried out hundreds of airstrikes in Gaza since Monday, killing four senior [Hamas](#) commanders and a dozen more [Hamas](#) operatives. Two high-rise buildings containing flats and offices in Gaza City were targeted. More than 1,500 rockets have been launched from Gaza, according to the Israeli military.

More than 80 Palestinians have now been killed, including 17 children, according to the Gaza health ministry. Seven people had been killed in Israel, medical officials said, including a five-year-old boy killed by shrapnel on Wednesday in the frontier town of Sderot.

As the crisis continued to worsen, the US energy corporation Chevron said it had shut down the Tamar natural gas platform off the Israeli coast as a precaution. Israel said its energy needs would continue to be met.

While the conflict raged, Israel appeared on the brink of losing control of its mixed cities. Netanyahu has called on Jews and Arabs to cease attacks on each other. “It doesn’t matter to me that your blood is boiling. You can’t take the law in your hands,” he said. However, Netanyahu previously [pledged](#) to restore order “with an iron fist if needed”, and his public security minister, Amir Ohana, has appeared to encourage mob violence.

On Wednesday, Ohana [called for the release](#) of a Jewish man arrested [in connection with a fatal shooting of an Arab man](#) in the city of Lod, after a synagogue and other Jewish property was torched. Ohana said, without providing evidence, that the shooter “acted in self-defence”. He added that “law-abiding citizens carrying weapons” were an aid to authorities.

Later on Wednesday, a mob of far-right Israelis [dragged a man they thought was an Arab](#) from his car and beat him until he lay on the ground motionless and bloodied.

Footage of the attack in Bat Yam, a Tel Aviv suburb, was broadcast live on television but police and emergency services did not arrive on the scene until 15 minutes later, while the victim lay in the middle of the street.

Videos were posted on social media of what appeared to be other attempted lynchings overnight. The burning of shops and restaurants were reported in towns across Israel, including Acre, Haifa and Tiberias. Police arrested more than 400 people.

Earlier on Wednesday the US president, Joe Biden, spoke to Netanyahu and voiced hope the increase in violence centred on Gaza would soon end. “My expectation and hope is this will be closing down sooner than later, but Israel has a right to defend itself,” Biden said.

Biden did not explain the reasons behind his optimism. Netanyahu’s office said he told the US president that Israel would “continue acting to strike at the military capabilities of Hamas and the other terrorist groups active in the Gaza Strip”.

Amid reports that Egyptian mediators were attempting to broker a deal to end the fighting, Benny Gantz, the Israeli defence minister, said: “Israel is

not preparing for a ceasefire. There is currently no end date for the operation. Only when we achieve complete quiet can we talk about calm.”

[Violence and mayhem offer Benjamin Netanyahu refuge | Harriet Sherwood](#)
[Read more](#)

The US secretary of state, Tony Blinken, condemned the rocket attacks during a call with the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, on Wednesday, and emphasised the need to de-escalate tensions, the US state department said. Abbas is a Hamas rival whose authority is limited to the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Hady Amr, the US deputy assistant secretary of state for Israel and Palestinian affairs, is to travel to the region immediately to meet Israeli and Palestinian leaders. A nomination for the empty post of US ambassador to Israel was to be made in the next few weeks, the White House said.

Since hostilities escalated on Monday evening, Hamas has fired about 1,500 rockets from Gaza into Israeli territory, according to the latest estimate by Israel’s army. The launch of about 350 rockets had failed, while hundreds more were intercepted by Israel’s Iron Dome air defence system, the army said.

The Israeli military said earlier it had killed four senior [Hamas](#) commanders in a “complex and first-of-its-kind operation” jointly with the Shin Bet security service. The dead included Bassem Issa, the Gaza City Brigade commander, the head of the cyber-command and the head of Hamas’s production network, a security agency statement said.

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[Israel](#)

‘All I saw was fire’: rockets fracture the sense of safety in Tel Aviv

The city’s reputation as a place to go to ignore the Israeli-Palestinian crisis changed when rockets landed

02:18

Israel-Gaza violence: flattened buildings, rockets and communal unrest – video

[Oliver Holmes](#) and *Quique Kierszenbaum* in Tel Aviv, and [Sufian Taha](#) in Jerusalem

Wed 12 May 2021 14.24 EDT

For children under the age of seven in Tel Aviv, this week was probably the first time their parents had to wake them in a panic, rush to a bomb shelter, and try to explain what was happening.

Tal Morry, a lawyer and mother, pretended to her five-year-old son that there was a firework show. However, the ruse did not last long. “Other kids told him the truth,” she sighed.

Since the last war with Hamas in 2014, Israel’s commercial capital has largely avoided regular bouts of fighting. During the past few years, while no full-scale conflict has been declared, Israel has often bombed Gaza while [militants have launched hundreds of rockets](#) on Israeli towns and cities in the south.

Tel Aviv has a reputation as a place to go to ignore the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. When the lively Mediterranean city hosted the Eurovision song contest in 2019, [contestants arrived and started rehearsals](#) despite a three-day battle raging miles to the south in which 23 Palestinians and four Israelis were killed.

That sense of safety was fractured on Tuesday night when Hamas, the Islamist militant group that rules inside Gaza, [heavily increased its attacks on Israel](#) by launching what it said was 130 “heavy rockets” 30 miles (50km) north towards Tel Aviv. Residents saw the night’s sky lit up by small, amber dots – dozens of rockets heading in their direction. Most were intercepted by Israel’s Iron Dome air defence system, but some made it through.

Konstantin Kandaurov, a 48-year-old software engineer, was watching football on television in his living room when the air aid siren started blaring in Rishon Lezion, just to the south of Tel Aviv. He rushed to the basement but made it only to the stairwell when the rocket hit, shaking the ground.

Panicked, he ran back upstairs and looked out of the window. Normally, he would see a quiet, cobble-stoned suburban street filled with gated semi-detached houses, each with trees in front and a place to park. The house across the street, No 16, usually had a quad bike out front.

On Tuesday night, he could not see the street at all. “All I saw was fire,” he said. “Big fire.” Across the road, a rocket had struck directly in front of number 18, killing a woman who lived there and leaving a whole section of the street in ruins.



People sheltering in the basement of a building in Tel Aviv after rockets were launched from Gaza. Photograph: Gideon Markowicz/AFP/Getty Images

Hamas militants in Gaza are infamous for their simple homemade rockets, called the Qassem after the group's Qassem brigades, but this was something much bigger. About 10 cars had been destroyed. One was barely recognisable, with only its blackened chassis and some wheel parts remaining, as well as the lingering smell of burnt petrol. Kandaurov's own house lost its windows, part of its roof and was littered with gashes where shrapnel had embedded.

He barely had time to check on his family when sirens went off again. "The sound of bombing continued for 20 to 25 minutes," Kandaurov said. "There was silence for one or two hours. Then again, every 10 minutes, a siren."

Another resident said one woman living further down the street had died the same night but of a heart attack. On Wednesday, at her house, an old man walked out the front door to check on a car that had its back window smashed, littering the inside, including a baby seat, with glass. He waved away reporters before walking back indoors.

Israel's military spokesperson, Lt Col Jonathan Conricus, said the Iron Dome had a roughly 90% interception rate and described the system, which the country had been using for a decade, as a "lifesaver".

As the conflict intensified, it appeared that militants had tried to overwhelm or work around the system by firing dozens of rockets at once, all at the same area. Conricus denied the rockets were "outsmarting the Iron Dome" but said they were longer range and larger than those used in previous fighting.

The rocket attacks began on Monday, when Hamas launched a barrage towards Jerusalem, after weeks of boiling tensions that ended in riot police storming the city's al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam.

Ilana, 76, who had lived in Tel Aviv since before Israel was established in 1948, described the events at al-Aqsa "as going against the whole Muslim

world”.

“I don’t know who made these decisions,” she said, asking to give only her first name. “It’s due to stupidity, simply stupidity.”

Unresolved anger around Israel’s treatment of Palestinians and its ever-deepening military grip over their lives has been bubbling in the holy city for months. More recently, a wave of evictions and demolitions, as well as police action to prevent people from gathering on steps outside the Old City during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, has inflamed the situation.

To many people in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem can feel far away – but not to all. The tension in the holy city has been felt acutely in Jaffa, a mixed Arab and Jewish neighbourhood in Tel Aviv. Jaffa, like many areas around Israel populated by its Arab minority, has seen near-nightly protests and intercommunal street attacks.

“I have not seen public anger like this,” said one coffee shop owner, Aziz al Azaa, 43.

Another resident, Abu Ibrahim Abu Halaweh, said many people in the neighbourhood were trying to ensure “hatred and violence” would not spread. “We live with each other whether we like it or not,” he said

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[Israel](#)

Live TV shows Israeli mob attack motorist they believed to be an Arab

Far-right crowd in Tel Aviv pull man they thought to be an Arab from his car and beat him in the street

02:18

Israel-Gaza violence: flattened buildings, rockets and communal unrest – video

Staff and agencies

Wed 12 May 2021 19.24 EDT

As [airstrikes and rocket fire continued across Israel and Gaza](#), towns with mixed Jewish and Arab populations have been struck by some of the worst communal violence that Israel has seen in years.

Late on Wednesday a mob of far-right Israelis dragged a man they thought was an Arab from his car and beat him until he lay on the ground motionless and bloodied.

Footage of the attack in Bat Yam, a Tel Aviv suburb, was broadcast live on television but police and emergency services did not arrive on the scene until 15 minutes later, while the victim lay motionless on his back in the middle of the street.

Those in the crowd justified the attack by saying the man was an Arab who had tried to ram the far-right nationalists, but the footage showed a motorist trying to avoid the demonstration.

“The victim of the lynching is seriously injured but stable,” Tel Aviv’s Ichilov hospital said in a statement.

Elsewhere in Bat Yam, a group of black-clad Israelis smashed the windows of an Arab-owned ice-cream shop and ultranationalists could be seen chanting: “Death to Arabs!” on live television during a standoff with border police.

In the northern city of Tiberias, video uploaded to social media appeared to show flag-waving Israelis attacking a car.

Earlier on Wednesday, the mayor of Lod, a city with both Jewish and Arab residents, warned that “civil war” was breaking out after Arab mourners clashed with police.

The Israeli prime minister, [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), called on both Jews and Arabs to cease attacks on each other: “It doesn’t matter to me that your blood is boiling. You can’t take the law in your hands,” he said.

Far-right lawmaker Betzael Smotrich, head of the Religious Zionism party, said he was “ashamed” of the “atrocious cruelty” of the Bat Yam attack.

“Jewish brothers, stop! We cannot under any circumstances allow ourselves to take part in violent acts,” he cautioned.

Israel’s chief rabbi, Yitzhak Yossef, also called for an end to attacks by Jews.

“Innocent citizens are being attacked by terrorist organisations, the heart is heavy and the images difficult, but we cannot allow ourselves to be drawn into provocations and aggressions,” he said.

Demonstrations by far-right Israelis broke out in several cities on Wednesday night, leading to clashes with police and sometimes Arab Israelis.

Police said they arrested nearly 400 people allegedly “involved in riots and disturbances” in cities across the country on Wednesday.

[Netanyahu visited Lod and Acre, where he pledged to “stop the anarchy”](#) and restore order “with an iron fist if needed”. Authorities deployed hundreds of police reinforcements to Lod and other areas, including paramilitary border police who usually operate in the occupied West Bank.

“The rioters in Lod and Acre do not represent Israeli Arabs, the rioters in Bat Yam ... do not represent Israeli Jews, violence will not dictate our lives,” said opposition leader, Yair Lapid, who is tasked with forming a government after March elections.

Palestinian militants in Gaza have launched hundreds of rockets since Monday at Israel, which has carried out airstrikes on the crowded coastal enclave.

The most intense hostilities in seven years between Israel and Gaza’s armed groups were triggered by weekend unrest at Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque compound.

Arab citizens of Israel have held mass protests across the country over Israel’s policing of a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem and plans to evict dozens of Palestinian families in the city after a legal campaign by Jewish settlers.

Adding to the tensions are increasingly powerful far-right groups in Israel that won seats in March elections and are allied with Netanyahu.

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Gaza

Gaza weapons boast may come back to haunt Hamas

Analysis: attacks will challenge Israeli establishment to deal with a threat made suddenly very real



Rockets are launched towards Israel from Rafah, in the south of the Gaza Strip. Photograph: Said Khatib/AFP/Getty Images

Rockets are launched towards Israel from Rafah, in the south of the Gaza Strip. Photograph: Said Khatib/AFP/Getty Images

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 10.35 EDT

In the rounds of fighting and violence between Hamas and [Israel](#) in Gaza in the last dozen years, one thing has always appeared baked into the proposition. For all their industriousness and attempts at innovation in developing weapons and ways of attacking, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have

been at best largely ineffectual when it comes to targeting [Israel](#) from inside the Gaza Strip.

From the early rocket systems to labour-intensive attack tunnels and incendiary balloons, the efforts were crude. Even when the rockets became more sophisticated by the time of the 2014 conflict, flying further and with bigger warheads, most of them were shot out of the sky.

Instead, Hamas's key military attribute appeared to be its resilience under attack when Israeli tanks went in.

This time, however, [something has changed](#). In the opening hours of the current fighting, the armed groups in Gaza have appeared more effective and far more determined.

They have issued ultimatums to Israel and then fired huge barrages of missiles in an effort to overwhelm Israel's vaunted Iron Dome anti-missile defence system – which typically intercepts between 85% and 95% of rockets – causing injuries and deaths.

This has led some to wonder whether Hamas has [understood the limitations](#) of Iron Dome.

Above all so far, it is the optics that have been most devastating. After the years of Israeli operations against [Gaza](#), with its blockaded population, grinding poverty and intermittent war, the signal from Hamas to Israel is that it is not only still there but perhaps more dangerous than ever.

The scale of the latest Gaza missile launches suggests the Israeli military and intelligence services have been caught napping. During the 2014 Gaza war, rockets out of the coastal enclave during the entire 50-day conflict numbered approximately 4,000, with the highest daily number about 200.

At present, rockets from Gaza are numbering much higher, including two occasions when more than 100 rockets have been fired in a handful of minutes.

What seems clear is that since 2014 – the last major conflict in Gaza – Hamas and the other armed groups in the coastal enclave have quietly rebuilt

their missile arsenals on a larger scale than had been understood.

Last year, in an unusual move, Hamas [shared details of its weapons procurement](#) with an Al Jazeera programme whose main aim appeared to be to demonstrate how efforts by Israel and Egypt, on Gaza's southern border, had not prevented it from rebuilding its arsenals, it is assumed with help from Syria and Iran.

It is a boast, however, that may come back to haunt Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The relative success – from Hamas's point of view – of its recent tactics, which have the appearance of having long been in preparation, are certain to challenge the Israeli political and security establishment to deal with a threat made suddenly very real.

While the Israeli military has been bombing launch sites, not least in northern Gaza, and targeting key figures, the evidence of past Gaza conflicts suggests this is rarely very effective.

[Living in Israel: how have you been affected by the recent violence?](#)
[Read more](#)

Previously this has led Israel to launch large-scale ground incursions with tanks into Gaza, efforts that have always stuttered to a halt in the face of growing international outrage and attempts at mediation.

Significant this time, perhaps, is that among the other weapons acquired by Hamas have been supplies of highly accurate Kornet anti-tank missiles, the same system that was used with much effect by Hezbollah against Israeli tanks in the second Lebanon war in 2006.

One of these missiles was used on Sunday to target an Israeli car close to the Gaza border. A second was fired early on Wednesday at a 4x4 vehicle, killing one occupant and seriously injuring two others. It delivered a clear message about what Israeli troops entering Gaza might face.

All of which contributes to a highly dangerous dynamic in which even if Hamas wanted to negotiate an end to the violence as some, including Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas's political bureau, are suggesting, political pressure in Israel could work against it.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/12/gaza-weapons-boast-may-come-back-to-haunt-hamas>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2021.05.13 - Coronavirus

- ['Hell on earth' Bereaved families on the battle for a Covid inquiry](#)
- [Working from home Guidance to end in England on 21 June, Johnson indicates](#)
- [Study Emphasis on personal benefits may be best way to fight vaccine scepticism](#)
- [Covid vaccines More frequent side-effects reported mixing Pfizer and Oxford jabs, study suggests](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

‘Hell on earth’: bereaved families on the battle for a Covid inquiry

The Bereaved Families for Justice group say the fight for a public inquiry has left a legacy of mistrust



Jo Goodman, co-founder of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, holds a portrait of her late father, Stuart. She says their fight for a public inquiry has been vindicated. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

Jo Goodman, co-founder of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, holds a portrait of her late father, Stuart. She says their fight for a public inquiry has been vindicated. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP



[David Conn](#)

Thu 13 May 2021 02.00 EDT

For families whose loved ones died due to Covid-19, and who have been calling on the government to hold a public inquiry for over a year, Boris Johnson's announcement of a [statutory inquiry to start next year](#) came as a bittersweet landmark. Jo Goodman, whose father, Stuart, 72, died last April, and who co-founded the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group [almost exactly a year ago](#), said their campaign had been vindicated, but the battle with the government has caused them "trauma upon trauma" and left a legacy of mistrust.

While the announcement was "a huge relief", the group warned that the inquiry was starting too late, and called on the government to involve bereaved families in key decision-making, including the choice of chair and terms of reference for the inquiry. Elkan Abrahamson, a Liverpool-based solicitor who has worked for free on the group's behalf, first wrote to Johnson on 11 June last year, calling for a rapid public inquiry, naming 56 bereaved families. The group emphasised the need for an immediate, "rapid review" inquiry, so that lessons could be learned to avoid a second wave of the virus. Goodman said it was devastating for families to see thousands

more people die in the winter, and the group still believes the inquiry should be set up immediately.

“In that first letter, we raised so many issues, including the discharge of people from hospital into care homes, the adequacy of test and trace, the timing of lockdown, that were not resolved by the second wave,” Goodman said. “Bereaved families had experienced other issues, such as [inadequate advice from the NHS 111 service](#), and [people being infected in hospitals](#). But the government refused to hold a rapid inquiry, and [Boris Johnson refused to meet us](#), and it was terrible to see so many more people die and families suffer.”



A member of the public writes on the National Covid Memorial wall
Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Until Wednesday, the government had consistently refused to commit to a formal, statutory inquiry, while saying there would be some form of inquiry but never specifying when it would happen. The government did not even respond to the families’ initial letter for five weeks, despite a reminder. When it did come, the reply was not from Johnson or the health secretary, Matt Hancock, but from a senior civil servant, Lee McDonough, at the Department of Health and Social Care. Last July he set out what has effectively remained the government’s position until this week: “At some

point in the future there will be an opportunity ... to look back, to reflect and to learn lessons. However, at the moment, the important thing is to focus on responding to the current pandemic.”

The families had asked for a meeting with Johnson and Hancock, but McDonough said they were too busy dealing with the pandemic to do so. Abrahamson and the group’s barrister, Pete Weatherby QC, who is also working pro bono, warned the government that it may seek a judicial review of its refusal to hold an inquiry, arguing that it has a legal duty to do so under [article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights](#). That requires an “effective investigation” when people have died in circumstances where the state had a duty to safeguard their lives.



Leshie Chandrapala, whose father (pictured), Ranjith Chandrapala, 64, died from Covid last May, said the campaign for an inquiry alongside grieving was creating a ‘ticking timebomb’ Photograph: Leshie Chandrapala/Reuters

The government responded by rejecting the argument that article 2 had been breached or that an immediate statutory inquiry was necessary to learn lessons, and refused to agree to waive its own legal costs if the group did apply for a judicial review. That forced the families to seek crowdfunding and apply for charitable grants, and they raised £50,000 to support the need to pay the government’s legal costs if they did go ahead with a legal

challenge. The recent story, denied by Downing Street, that Johnson said in November that he would rather [“let the bodies pile high in their thousands”](#) than order another lockdown, caused the families further anguish.

“For us it has been trauma upon trauma,” Goodman said. “Our loved ones died from this virus in circumstances that we believe were avoidable. Then we have had to put our grief on hold and fight for the truth, and answers. It has been a further trauma to be fobbed off and ignored, and have our sensible request for an inquiry refused, until now.

“The group has grown to 4,000 members and it is incredible to finally see this announcement; my mum and I had a little cry when we heard the news. But because of how we’ve been treated, we still feel mistrustful, and insistent that we need to be fully involved, including in the choice of chairperson and the areas the inquiry will address.”

Leshie Chandrapala, whose father, Ranjith, a London bus driver, [died from the virus last May](#), said she had suffered “absolute hell on earth” due to losing him, then having to fight for details about his working conditions on the buses during the pandemic, and for his death to be accepted as a workplace fatality. She said it was vital for families to be “involved and consulted” in the inquiry from the start.

“I don’t know what ‘to cope’ means any more,” Chandrapala said. “I am trying my best because I was brought up by my dad to be responsible, honest and not let people down. However, doing so alongside grieving in a pandemic, and campaigning, is creating a great big mental health ticking timebomb which will no doubt explode by the time this is all over.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/13/hell-on-earth-bereaved-families-on-the-battle-for-a-covid-inquiry>.

[Coronavirus](#)

Work from home guidance to end in England on 21 June, Johnson indicates

Prime minister tells MPs government intends to take step when it moves to final stage of Covid reopening

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A government scientist source was reported as saying there was no reason to return to an office full-time if work could be done at home. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

A government scientist source was reported as saying there was no reason to return to an office full-time if work could be done at home. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

[Kevin Rawlinson](#) and agency

Wed 12 May 2021 13.22 EDT

Guidance that people in [England](#) should work from home if they can is to be dropped from 21 June, the prime minister has indicated.

Boris Johnson told MPs on Wednesday the government intended to take the step when it moved to the final stage in its Covid reopening plans. “That is certainly our intention, provided we stay on track,” he told the Commons when asked about the proposal by the Tory MP Felicity Buchan.

“We’ll wait until we’re able to say that with more clarity a bit later on because we must be guided by what’s happening with the pandemic. It does depend on keeping the virus down.”

The guidance encouraging people to work from home has helped drive down the risk of passing on coronavirus and government scientists have privately suggested it makes sense for people to continue working from home to reduce contact with others.

According to PA Media, a government scientist source said there was no reason to return to an office full-time if work could be done at home. The source said that, even last August, people were still only at about 50% of pre-pandemic contact levels with others.

They added that measures this summer that could help keep case rates in check include home working, good ventilation in buildings, and tables being kept apart.

But Buchan, whose constituency is in London, highlighted the difficulties facing the city’s economy, with shops and cafes in town and city centres that relied on office workers hit hard by the change in working patterns.

Downing Street would not be drawn on whether the government’s chief scientific adviser (CSA), Sir Patrick Vallance, and the chief medical officer (CMO) for England, Prof Chris Whitty, backed the plan. The prime minister’s spokesperson said: “I can’t speak for the CMO and CSA on this. The government always set out its intention to review this guidance ahead of [step 4 \[on the roadmap\]](#) for England.”

Asked what preparations were being made for civil servants to return to their desks, the spokesperson said: “I think you are jumping ahead. We will set out our approach nearer the time to provide suitable preparation to all businesses and, indeed, the civil service.”

In February, [the Guardian reported](#) that there were concerns some employers were putting workers at risk and increasing Covid infection rates after research suggested as many as one in five people had been going into their workplace unnecessarily.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/12/work-from-home-guidance-end-england-21-june-johnson-indicates>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Vaccines and immunisation

Emphasis on personal may be best way to fight vaccine scepticism, research suggests

GB study points to highlighting personal benefits being key to counter vaccine hesitancy

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A patient receiving a Covid-19 vaccine. Latest figures report 7% of adults in Great Britain being hesitant about having a vaccination. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

A patient receiving a Covid-19 vaccine. Latest figures report 7% of adults in Great Britain being hesitant about having a vaccination. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

Nicola Davis *Science correspondent*

@NicolaKSDavis

Wed 12 May 2021 18.30 EDT

Emphasising the personal benefits of vaccination against Covid may be an effective way to reduce scepticism in those most hesitant towards having a jab, research suggests.

In the UK [more than two-thirds of adults](#) have received at least one dose of a Covid vaccine, with about a third having had two doses.

But while uptake in the UK has generally been high, some people remain hesitant. According to the [latest figures from the Office for National Statistics](#), covering 31 March to 25 April, about 7% of adults in Great Britain reported being hesitant about having a Covid vaccination.

Prof Daniel Freeman, of the University of Oxford, said while most of the population appreciated the collective benefits of vaccination and were willing to be vaccinated, those who were strongly hesitant may feel there were no consequences of catching the disease, but that vaccines posed a risk to themselves.

Research from Freeman and his colleagues suggests that emphasising that vaccination can protect a person against serious illness or long Covid may be the best way to steer the most hesitant individuals towards a more positive view.

“As soon as you fear that you may get some personal harm from taking a vaccine, your decision making is dominated by personal risk,” said Freeman. “Therefore the best way to counterweight that is by highlighting personal benefit [of vaccination]”.

[Writing in the journal Lancet Public Health](#), Freeman and his colleagues report how they recruited almost 19,000 UK adults through a market research company between 19 January and 18 February, with the sample enriched for those who were strongly hesitant towards vaccination – as determined from a question around willingness to be vaccinated.

Participants were then randomly allocated to read one of 10 brief statements about Covid vaccines. The statements ranged from those emphasising the collective benefit of the jabs, to those emphasising personal benefits, as well as a “control” message that was a simple statement from the NHS website about safety and efficacy. Participants were then asked to complete further questionnaires asking about their attitude towards being vaccinated against Covid.

The results reveal that the average level of vaccine hesitancy among those deemed willing or doubtful about Covid vaccinations was similar regardless of which statement they read.

“The people who are most sitting on the fence are still sitting on the fence,” said Freeman.

Among the strongly hesitant, some of the messages were linked to a lower level of vaccine hesitancy than the control message, in particular the message stressing the personal benefits of the jabs.

However, the effect was small: while the strongly hesitant who read the control message had a score of 28.53 on a 35-point scale of vaccine hesitancy, this was reduced to 27.04 among those who read about the personal benefits of the jab.

The researchers add that actual vaccination behaviour may differ from expressed willingness, while there may have been biases in who took part in the study, and the results may not hold for other countries. In addition, Freeman noted there were indications some messages might be received differently by different ethnic groups.

However, he said the results could still be important given the number of people who are vaccine-hesitant.

“This shows the potential of the personal benefit messaging, but of course that still needs to be amplified, and embedded and repeated,” he said.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Vaccines and immunisation

More frequent side-effects reported mixing Pfizer and Oxford Covid jabs, study suggests

However, UK trial found two doses of the same vaccine triggered less adverse reactions

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The study is exploring the safety and efficacy of mixed-dose schedules, which are being considered in several countries due to unstable vaccine supplies. Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

The study is exploring the safety and efficacy of mixed-dose schedules, which are being considered in several countries due to unstable vaccine supplies. Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

[Natalie Grover](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 18.30 EDT

Administering one dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine followed by one of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine (or vice versa) induces a higher frequency of mild to moderate side-effects compared with standard two doses of either vaccine, initial data from a key UK trial suggests.

The Oxford-led [Com-Cov](#) study is exploring the safety and efficacy of [mixed-dose schedules](#) given that they are being considered in several countries – including the UK – to fortify vaccine rollout programmes that are dependent on unstable vaccine supplies.

The trial involves 830 participants aged 50 and over, some of whom have underlying conditions. It is testing four combinations: Oxford/AstraZeneca + Oxford/AstraZeneca; Oxford/AstraZeneca + Pfizer/BioNTech; Pfizer/BioNTech + Pfizer/BioNTech; and Pfizer/BioNTech + Oxford/AstraZeneca.

The first tranche of data has come from the group of 463 participants who were given their first and second dose (of any regimen) with a four-week gap. Participants self-reported symptoms in the seven days after the second dose.

Overall, both mixed-dose schedules triggered more side-effects. For instance, feverishness was reported by 34% of patients who got Oxford/AstraZeneca followed by Pfizer/BioNTech; and 41% of those given Pfizer/BioNTech followed by Oxford/AstraZeneca. Meanwhile, only 10% reported feeling feverish in the group who received both Oxford/AstraZeneca doses; and 21% reported the symptom in the group that received two Pfizer/BioNTech doses.

Similar differences were observed for chills, fatigue, headache, joint pain, malaise, and muscle ache. Overall, any adverse reactions that cropped up were short-lived and there were no other safety concerns, according to data published in the form of a letter in the journal the Lancet.

“These are the type of reactions we do expect with vaccines ... and they are more or less the same types of reactions that you’re seeing with the standard schedules. It’s just that they’re occurring more frequently,” said Matthew Snape, the trial’s chief investigator and associate professor in paediatrics and vaccinology at the University of Oxford.

Although trial participants were aged 50 and above, real-world data suggests that younger age groups tend to have stronger reactions to vaccines, he noted. “We would expect that this signal ... of higher reactions in the mixed schedules, would still come through, and [in] younger age groups there might be even more reactions.”

What this data suggests is that immunising a ward full of nurses on the same day with a mixed schedule may not be ideal because it might trigger higher rates of absenteeism the next day, he said. “In those countries that are starting to think about using these schedules ... they may need to prepare for higher rates of absenteeism.

“Reactions often relate to the stimulating of the innate immune response, so ... that fundamental part of the immune response that sends an inflammatory signal – whether or not this will relate to actually improved immune response, we don’t know yet,” Snape said.

Data on the efficacy of these mixed-schedule regimens in inducing an immune response is expected in the coming weeks. Trial investigators are also evaluating the impact of dosing participants 12 weeks apart.

Another study called Com-Cov2 will assess the impact of participants receiving either the Oxford/AstraZeneca or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, and then either getting the Moderna or Novavax vaccine for their second dose.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/12/more-frequent-side-effects-reported-mixing-pfizer-and-oxford-covid-jabs-study-suggests>

2021.05.13 - Spotlight

- [Tracey Emin on beating cancer You can curl up and die – or you can get on with it](#)
- [The long read Cruel, paranoid, failing: inside the Home Office](#)
- [No visitors but teeming with life What's going on inside the Natural History Museum?](#)
- [The Guardian picture essay From London to Beijing on the old Silk Road](#)

[Tracey Emin](#)

Interview

Tracey Emin on her cancer self-portraits: ‘This is mine. I own it’

[Jonathan Jones](#)

As she starts to rebuild her life after surgery, the artist shares her unflinching self-portraits taken during treatment, talks about seeing dead people in hospital walls, and explains why she’s buying herself a punchbag – and kittens



Hospital diary ... Tracey Emin, *We All Bleed*, 2020 Photograph: Image courtesy Tracey Emin (2020)

Hospital diary ... Tracey Emin, *We All Bleed*, 2020 Photograph: Image courtesy Tracey Emin (2020)



Thu 13 May 2021 01.00 EDT

‘I’m smiling and talking to you,’ says [Tracey Emin](#), sitting at her kitchen table. “But it’s not always like this.” We’ve been delaying this conversation until she finally felt well enough. She has been spending a lot of time in bed, just resting. On the phone, she sounded weak, but today she is indeed smiling, getting excited as she speaks – the Tracey who I have been fortunate enough to get to know.

“Now I’ve got a terrible pain in my legs, it’s unbearable. That’s why I’ve been in bed. I’m determined to go for a walk later because I hardly ever go out. I have a urostomy bag, so I have a major disability. The more well I get, the more annoying it is. Previously it was all right because I was on morphine. But now I want to do things and I can’t.”

Her disability is the result of a massive operation last year to save her life when she found she had squamous cell bladder cancer. It worked: she announced recently, on Newsnight, that she’s had the [all-clear](#). But it has cost her dearly: as well as losing her uterus, ovaries, lymph nodes, part of her colon, her urethra and part of her vagina, she says: “I’ve got no bladder.” So for the rest of her life, she has to use a urostomy bag.



Courageous soul ... Tracey Emin at the Royal Academy last November for the opening of her joint show with Edvard Munch. Photograph: David Parry/Rex/Shutterstock

This is not private. Emin [has spoken about her illness](#) and gradual recovery with an honesty that has shown people who may have thought of her just as a loudmouth celebrity artist exactly how sensitive and courageous a soul she is. Why does she think she made it? “Fucking luck, number one. Number two, getting a good diagnosis and prognosis really fast. The other thing was: Covid was happening and most people weren’t going to the doctors or hospital, weren’t having checkups. I just felt so unwell, just thought really this is not right. And then the surgeon I had was fantastic. And I had robots! The robots were pretty nifty. The robots can go places and do things that human hands can’t.”

Emin thought her acclaimed exhibition at the [Royal Academy with Edvard Munch](#), which opened for just nine days before lockdown, might be her farewell show. But both she and it now have a new lease of life with the exhibition reopening next week. This public ability to speak so universally about her illness, I ask, is it an extension of the retelling of her life that she’s being doing in the art world for more than three decades? A kind of performance art? It’s a crass question, I realise, and she’s not having it: she’s

speaking out, she says, to help herself and others deal with challenges and stigma.



Documenting her life ... Self-portrait with urostomy bag, taken in December. Photograph: Image courtesy Tracey Emin (2020)

“Having a urostomy bag is quite a disadvantage for lots of reasons and it’s something that most people would want to keep a secret. It’s a very private thing because, basically, you’ve got part of your bodily function happening on the outside of your body. It leaks and things happen. I could be out somewhere public and it could happen – and people’d just think I’ve pissed myself or think I’ve been drinking. Also, I could come out of a disabled toilet and people would go: ‘Oh, Tracey Emin’s been in there for ages, she’s putting her makeup on.’ First of all, I’m entitled to put my makeup on in a disabled toilet. But secondly, I’m not putting my makeup on, I’m not hanging out in there for the sheer hell of it. So it wasn’t a performance thing, and if someone thinks it is they can swap places – all right, see how much they’d like to be a successful artist without a bladder.”

But no one actually thinks she’s getting off on this, do they? “Someone said something horrible about me the other day on Instagram. They said: ‘She should just let up.’ I thought: ‘Fuck them – this is mine, I own it.’ What the fuck are they talking about? Let up from what? Let up from the fact that for

the rest of my life I've got a bag attached to me with a load of piss in it? There's different ways of dealing with stuff. You can go off into a corner and curl up and die, or you can just get on with it. If talking about it is getting on with it, expressing myself, then yeah I will, because it's much better than the alternative – a hundred million times better.”

Emin's [Royal Academy show](#) confirms her as a great modern painter, a raw and inspired abstract expressionist. And yet she is also someone who lives her life, if not as art, then very close to it. Anything that happens to her can become a story, a video, a blanket, a neon text – or a media interview, another form of her artistic expression. She already had plenty to tell when she started showing what many called “confessional art” in her first exhibition at Jay Jopling's White Cube in 1993. So am I wrong to see painting as her greatest achievement? Is the narration of her life, cancer and all, her true art?

She disagrees, saying that confession implies guilt. “I say something and it's considered to be ‘a confession’. I'm not confessing that I had cancer, I'm not confessing that I've got a urostomy bag. I have had cancer and I have a urostomy bag. It's a statement.”



For Love, 2020 ... Emin with night bag. Photograph: Image courtesy Tracey Emin (2020)

Emin, who is now 57, emphatically does not consider her life to be a work of art, which makes her polar opposites to her old neighbours in London's East End, [Gilbert and George](#). "Gilbert and George are performance artists. Everything they do is performing. I was their neighbour for 20 years and they kept that veneer up for the whole time. It never slipped. They carried my shopping home once – and it was the two smallest bags of shopping! As the three of us walked down the road, I knew it looked really good, they knew it looked really good. They think. They calculate. They understand. They're visionaries. But I'm not planning, I'm not understanding. I'm making mistakes as I go along."

A nurse asked if I'd seen anything funny. And I went, 'Yeah, I saw dead people come out of the wall' ... They looked like roundheads coming to get me'

Yet she obsessively reworks this raw material. She took photographs and kept records in hospital, not to make art about her cancer, she says, but because documenting her experiences is what she always does. She is allowing the Guardian to publish some of those extraordinary pictures, which rank among her most arresting, disconcerting and unforgettable work. She even had to legally define the boundary of her art and life last year. "When I thought I might die, we had to go over all my will and redo everything really fast. And we had to get some sort of clarity about what is art and what isn't – because could you imagine people putting stuff of mine together and saying it's art and it definitely wasn't!" Then again, she says with a grin, "I'd be happy with a couple of Picasso's handkerchiefs."

One example of the way Emin's life and art merge is her ouija board. It is classed as an artwork and was recently shown at White Cube. Yet it is not an ironic artefact. I thought she was joking, at first, when she initiated a seance at a party a few years ago. And I make the same mistake for a moment now, when she starts relating an uncanny experience as she came round from her cancer surgery.



Another postoperative self-portrait. Photograph: Image courtesy Tracey Emin (2020)

“When I was in hospital, after I came out of intensive care, the nurse came in and she said to me: ‘Have you had anything funny happen? Has anyone strange been here?’ And I went: ‘Yeah, actually. I saw all these dead people come out of the wall and they were all surrounding the bed.’ She said to me: ‘Why didn’t you call me? What did you say to them?’ I said I told them to fuck off. Some of them looked like [roundheads](#), they were strange. I thought: ‘Oh fuck, they’re coming to get me.’”

Before going into hospital, Emin tried to make a list of the departed loved ones she wanted to meet, including her mother, her cat and her father. A friend stopped her. “Because if I went into hospital thinking: ‘Oh yeah, I’ll hook up to my mum,’ then there’s a good chance you’ll go off to that other side.”

It is impossible to understand Emin, I have learned, if you don’t accept her spiritual beliefs. Like William Blake, one of her heroes, she intuitively perceives a world beyond the visible. After all, she proclaims: “An artist should perceive the world differently from other people. That’s what makes them an artist.” It’s a Romantic idea of the artistic vocation, very different from the rationalist attitude to art that sometimes prevails today, with even the Turner judges

doubting that artists are special, gifted, insightful individuals. Well, Emin is. She sees ghosts and dreams about her lost ones. She lives as much in the past as the present.

“It’s not religious beliefs,” she says. “It’s scientific really. I really do think there are other dimensions. I think that time is of one. I’m sure there is a me that’s sitting on the end of my bed looking at me when I was a little girl. I’m sure all these ‘mes’ are spread over time. It’s not life after death, it’s more like a transition into another realm.”

After she had her biopsy, she awoke to see her dead cat, Docket, poking his head around the door to watch over her. “I realised it was a dream. But it was so brilliant. Docket was actually in the room. Lovely. He’d come to see if I was all right.” This blurring of dreams and reality is where Emin’s paintings begin. Her beautiful new house, a neoclassical work by Robert Adam built in the 1770s, has a superb skylit painting studio that was added by a previous owner, a “Bloomsbury artist”, then converted into a kitchen.



I Thrive on Solitude ... Emin’s drawing board with works from last summer.
Photograph: Tracey Emin

It is now a studio again. Against the wall stands one of the first paintings she has begun since her illness – and it is the record of a dream. It depicts her

mother carrying her on her back in the choppy sea off Margate. “It sounds so corny and awful, but it was a dream I had.” She dreamed she was drowning and her mum saved her. But this picture doesn’t satisfy her. It’s got the “Max Beckmann problem”, she says, referring to the German expressionist who she finds “too illustrative”. She hates the idea of doing illustrations. Her paintings may start along those lines, but by the time they reach the wall they are mighty oceans of red or tempests of black and blue. She once showed me a picture of us talking about art – but, to my chagrin, the figures had vanished in abstraction by the time it was finished.



Exhausting ... Self portrait in bed, 2021. Photograph: Image courtesy Tracey Emin (2021)

Returning to painting was exhausting and terrifying, she says. “Just starting – oh my God! I was trying to open up the primer tins and it was, ‘Oh, Christ!’ That stuff I really took for granted. It makes you think about people with physical disabilities and what they have to get over. It’s pretty intense and amazing.”

She’s planning to get a punchbag to build up her strength, for she really hurls and pummels the paint on. She identifies with Jackson Pollock because, like him, she paints from “inside” the canvas, rather than standing safely “outside” it. “Any painter will tell you, the failures within painting

kill you – they kill you! You go to bed mournful, you go to bed feeling it's the end of the world. It's *suffering* if you don't get it right. That's quite a big deal to put yourself through. It's this battle. But it's just you and it. And you kind of – it sounds so pretentious - but it's like a vortex, it pulls you in."



Homage to Turner ... Tracey Emin's much admired *The Ship*. Photograph: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd/The Artist

Hanging in her front room is her painting *The Ship*, a wondrous whirl of pink, white and black that started as a love scene and became a typhoon-tossed homage to her Margate forerunner JMW Turner. We both love this painting and I can understand why she refused to sell it after it blew away everyone else in last year's RA summer show. Looking at it together I see there's no gap between Emin the "confessionalist" and Emin the painter. She can tell her life on TV or slap it onto canvas and the results are equally powerful. And she intends to continue her adventures in art and life.

"This is the happiest I've ever been," she says. "There are things I was scared of before that I'm not scared of any more. That makes you happier and more content as a person. I'm thinking about getting some kittens – or a dog."

The headline of this article was amended on 13 May 2021 to reflect our style guidelines on terminology around illness, and a reference to Emin's age, removed during the editing process, was reinstated.

Tracey Emin/Edvard Munch: The Loneliness of the Soul is at the Royal Academy, London, 18 May-1 August.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/may/13/tracey-emin-on-beating-cancer-you-can-curl-up-and-die-or-you-can-get-on-with-it>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Cruel, paranoid, failing: inside the Home Office

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No visitors but teeming with life: what's going on inside the Natural History Museum?

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From London to Beijing on the old Silk Road – a photo essay

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2021.05.13 - Opinion

- That wasn't quite the resounding Conservative election victory it seemed
- If the government is serious about 'global Britain', why is it cutting research funding?
- The Ballymurphy verdict shows the need to examine the unresolved killings of the Troubles
- Why we need an inspiring team talk to get us through the pandemic

[OpinionElections 2021](#)

That wasn't quite the resounding Conservative election victory it seemed

[Martin Kettle](#)



Johnson dominates English politics. But the incumbency effect, and diverse progressive vote, can't be discounted.



Boris Johnson and newly elected Conservative MP Jill Mortimer in Hartlepool on 7 May. Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

Boris Johnson and newly elected Conservative MP Jill Mortimer in Hartlepool on 7 May. Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

Thu 13 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Britain's 2021 [local and devolved elections](#) can be summed up in three statements. The first is that good results for the Conservatives conceal more problems for them than meet the eye. The second is that the results should not cause the Labour party to panic. The third is that Labour has, nevertheless, [panicked](#).

It can't be stressed too strongly that these elections were unique. They have taken place as the pandemic emergency appears to be nearing its end. This has been achieved by a pacesetting government- and NHS-led vaccination programme, that is hugely and rightly popular. Other things being equal, incumbents were always in a position to do well in these circumstances.

Which is exactly what happened. In England, Scotland and Wales, incumbents from rival parties – Tories, SNP and [Labour](#) – all prospered last week. This was hardly surprising. The vaccination programme is a UK-wide achievement with 88% public approval. It is no wonder that opposition

parties in each country struggled to persuade voters that it was time for a change.

Yet the results were not solely a reward for incumbency. If that had been so, governing parties might have won by landslides. None of them did. Instead, the differences between last week's results and those of the recent past, though good for incumbents, were often quite modest. The SNP, for example, put up its vote share by only one percentage point, in spite of Nicola Sturgeon's popularity. Every opposition party – certainly including Labour in England – could also point to successes as well as failures.

In local elections, the key big-picture figure is the [projected national share of the vote](#), an estimate of how the nation would have voted in a general election, based on the votes actually cast for the main parties in the local contests. By this yardstick, the Tories beat Labour last week by [36% of the votes to 29%](#), with the Liberal Democrats on 17%. So, yes, that's a good Tory win, with a lead over Labour of seven points.

But it wasn't huge and it wasn't groundbreaking. It wasn't as good as Theresa May achieved in the 2017 local elections, when many of the English local seats were last contested, and when the Tories led by nine points. In the 2019 general election, moreover, the Tory lead increased to 12. Translated into parliamentary numbers, the difference between 2019 and 2021 would sharply reduce Boris Johnson's 80-seat majority at Westminster.

The next thing to consider is that the Conservatives achieved many of their English successes last week thanks to the disappearance of Ukip and the Brexit party. That was spectacularly the case in the Hartlepool byelection. Here, the absence of the Brexit party, which took 26% of the vote in 2019, saw the Tory share [nearly double](#). But the absence of Ukip from local and devolved elections, which were mostly last contested in 2016 and 2017, also helped the Tories this time.

[Politics is no longer about left or right, as the Tories have realised to their advantage](#) | [Lee de Wit](#)
[Read more](#)

But not by as much as the Tories might have hoped. Back in 2016, before the Brexit referendum, Ukip won 12% of the votes in the English local elections. But the Tories only added six points between the 2016 locals and last week. Compare this with the Senedd elections: Ukip won 12% of the votes in Wales in 2016; last week Reform UK won only 2%. Last Thursday, the Tory share rose by a fairly modest five percentage points, but – and here’s a key difference from England – Labour also registered a similar increase. Mark Drakeford’s incumbency in Wales looks to have achieved something that eludes Keir Starmer in England: an ability to [reconnect with leave voters](#).

Overall, the [Conservatives](#) under Johnson have regained some hegemony over the centre-right vote. By contrast, Labour has failed to achieve anything comparable on the centre-left, except perhaps in Wales. In several parts of southern England, the fragmentation of the centre-left vote actually deepened, with the Liberal Democrats and the Greens both competing with Labour for non-Conservative support.

This fragmentation understandably underlies the current talk in parts of the centre-left about creating a [progressive alliance](#) between these parties, with a commitment to proportional representation. But this fragmented progressive vote can also make the Conservatives vulnerable, even now.

Last week, amid several victories, the Tories lost control of councils such as Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and the Isle of Wight. They also lost seats in counties such as Hertfordshire, Surrey and Kent, as well as in Trafford in Greater Manchester. The Lib Dems, Greens and Labour all made gains at their expense.

Conservative poll watchers now [contemplate](#) the vulnerability of a “blue wall”, mainly around London. In these areas, voters who are culturally alienated from Johnson’s party may be rallying behind the best-placed opposition party. Johnson’s new planning bill, announced this week, could be an explosive catalyst in this process. The forthcoming Chesham and Amersham byelection, in a traditionally solid Tory constituency astride the HS2 rail line, will be a good indicator, with the Lib Dems the principal challenger.

None of this is to pretend that Johnson does not dominate British politics right now. He does, and he should be taken more seriously. Nor is it to deny that a damaged Starmer has huge amounts to prove. That's true, too. But, as the pandemic eases and more familiar politics resume, it is not just Labour that needs to clarify where it stands. Cracks in the Conservatives' apparently commanding position show the Tories face a challenge of their own, too.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Opinion](#)Coronavirus

If the government is serious about ‘global Britain’, why is it cutting research funding?

[Fiona Tomley](#)

Vital international scientific work, including studies into how viruses spread, is being jeopardised by short-sighted cuts



Hygiene officials check poultry in Hong Hong. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Hygiene officials check poultry in Hong Hong. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Thu 13 May 2021 04.00 EDT

Given the ambitions outlined in the government’s integrated review of “[Global Britain in a Competitive Age](#)”, you could be forgiven for thinking

that research into the causes, detection and control of emerging infectious diseases with pandemic potential was being taken pretty seriously at the highest level. The government will “build on the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic to improve our use of data to anticipate and respond to future crises”, and intends to “drive towards a more science-led approach to the problems we face”. Or so it claims.

At the sharp end, the reality is very different. The integrated review was published five days after [UK Research and Innovation](#) (UKRI), the body representing the UK’s seven research councils, posted an [open letter](#) explaining that its official development assistance (ODA) allocation had been slashed and there was now a £120m deficit in funds promised to research already up and running. This has left the programme I lead, the [One Health Poultry Hub](#), with a 70% cut in its funding.

We are a network of 27 institutions in 10 countries. The work is far from glamorous and requires painstaking planning and coordination between teams from many disciplines, including social, veterinary, medical, biological and computational sciences. We study major sites of poultry production in south and south-east Asia, mapping and quantifying movements of chickens and people through different production and distribution networks, conducting interviews to understand what constrains or governs the actions of people involved in chicken rearing, trading, slaughter and consumption, collecting samples from chickens, people and the environment, isolating and characterising bacteria and viruses that can pass from chickens to people and antimicrobial resistance genes.

Integrating these strands of data allows us to understand how and where pathogens that make people sick emerge, amplify and transmit, to identify the behaviours and systems that pose the highest risks, and test intervention strategies that reduce the likelihood of disease spillover to people.

Our hub works on public health risks associated with global intensification of chicken production. This includes avian influenza (“bird flu”) with pandemic potential, and the “silent pandemic” of antimicrobial resistance, identified by the World Health Organization as a top-10 global health threat and predicted by former Conservative minister Jim O’Neill to cause a potential [10 million deaths](#) by 2050. Covid-19 is the most recent pandemic

to emerge from interactions between people and animals in food production systems, but it won't be the last. Sadly, I have spent the past month trying to determine which parts of our research programme are expendable, when the truth is that none of them are.

The hub is funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), which harnesses the expertise of world-leading UK researchers to work with equivalent experts in developing countries and tackle the most difficult and persistent global challenges. GCRF does not fit a stereotypical picture of UK aid. It is a rigorously reviewed and managed collection of cutting-edge programmes that nurture international partnerships, build common approaches and support the positioning of the UK at the heart of global research, innovation and knowledge exchange. One of the most frustrating and sad things for the hubs is that they are doing precisely what the government is pledging as a priority for "Global Britain", yet almost simultaneously it has slashed our budgets.

[Why is the world still being hit by wave after wave of Covid when we know how to stop it? | Helen Clark and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](#)
[Read more](#)

In mid-2017, GCRF called for UK researchers to come up with ambitious ways to address the most intractable challenges facing humanity – climate change, conflict, population growth, urbanisation, growing inequalities and global health. The response was overwhelming, with about 250 proposals submitted. These kinds of programme are rightly subject to layers of scrutiny and approval and what followed was 16 months of reviews, refinements and in-depth interviews. It was in direct contrast, for example, to the speed with which [£37bn](#) of public money was deployed to UK Covid-19 testing and contact tracing. At the end of this highly competitive process, a dozen interdisciplinary research hubs were funded for five years with UKRI investment of £200m. They [launched](#) in March 2019 as: "Our answer to some of the world's most pressing challenges ... to make the world, and the UK, safer, healthier and more prosperous."

Jump to 31 March 2021 and hub directors were told by UKRI that all hub budgets were to be reduced by approximately 70% for 2021-22, to take

effect the next day. But it was no April fool. If we didn't like it, we were told, we could terminate our grants.

A key pillar of GCRF is the vision that strengthening international networks of research and innovation provides agile response to emergencies. This was certainly the case for the One [Health](#) Poultry Hub. When Covid-19 struck just one year into our programme, we rapidly diverted resources to Covid response and research in the UK and Asia, while maintaining capacity to continue with our original plans, recognising that threats from avian influenza and AMR remain as serious as ever.

We don't know why the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy targeted GCRF with such a deep cut; the ODA commitment went from 0.7% to 0.5% of gross national income but all 12 hubs were slashed by more than double this reduction. Do the department and the government more widely know what the hubs are set up to do? The partnerships they represent? The reputations they have? Do ministers recognise the impact these cuts are having on the UK's international reputation as a trusted partner? Despite attempts and offers to engage in discussion and work with government to forge a shared vision of the future, hub directors and other GCRF grant holders have so far had no constructive responses. We can only hope that this will change as the dust settles; my door certainly remains open for us to build back better together.

Prof Fiona Tomley is director of the One Health Poultry Hub

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[OpinionNorthern Ireland](#)

The Ballymurphy verdict shows the need to examine the unresolved killings of the Troubles

[Malachi O'Doherty](#)

Finally, the families of 10 victims have vindication. But the British government shouldn't be avoiding justice in Northern Ireland



Family members of the victims of Ballymurphy celebrate the findings of the report. Photograph: Clodagh Kilcoyne/Reuters

Family members of the victims of Ballymurphy celebrate the findings of the report. Photograph: Clodagh Kilcoyne/Reuters

Thu 13 May 2021 05.00 EDT

On the first day of the [Ballymurphy massacre](#) in August 1971, I was at my family home in Riverdale, another housing estate in predominantly

nationalist west Belfast. I watched a group of young men organising materials for a barricade and stacking crates of petrol bombs.

The first internment raids had been launched across [Belfast](#) in the early hours of that morning, with the British army rounding up without trial people they suspected of involvement in the IRA. There was an atmosphere of apprehension laced with an almost carnival spirit.

We could hear the distant gunfire and smell smoke on the breeze.

I walked past the men to shops at Finaghy and as I returned an army vehicle came up the road and they ran out to attack it. The vehicle stopped and soldiers in red berets stepped on to the road to take up positions. The first shots I heard were rubber bullets, distinct for their rounder, coarser sound. By the time I reached my home, just a hundred yards further on, I heard two rifle shots. I had heard shots before. We all had.

The soldiers had not been on any mission in Riverdale. They were on their way somewhere else but took the invitation from the men to come and fight, shot one person dead and cleared off. They killed Frank McGuinness, a teenager. They hadn't needed to kill him. They could have let a few bricks bounce off their vehicle and carried on.

That was the first of many killings by the army around the [internment operation](#). The killings we have heard about this week, at an inquest, are the 10 that are called the [Ballymurphy massacre](#). In fact, the army shot dead 19 people in the first four days of internment week, and most of those in disputed circumstances.

One of the dead was a 50-year-old Protestant woman called Sarah Worthington who was standing in her living room in Velsheda Park, near rioting in Ardoyne where whole streets were burning.

The families of 10 people killed in Ballymurphy that week organised a coherent campaign over many years, effectively giving a series of atrocities a singular focus, though the rest of the bloodletting that week has not had quite so much attention. They worked hard to draw attention to their justified cause and their success was in having a single inquest for that group

of killings. This was a very slow, difficult process. Though everybody in Belfast knew about the killings at the time, there was no label put on them then in the way that [Bloody Sunday](#) instantly had a name.

I have been researching what I call the “Year of Chaos” for a book to be published in the autumn. At the time there seemed to be no campaign focused on those killings in Ballymurphy. Indeed, when the taoiseach, Jack Lynch, met the prime minister, Ted Heath, at a summit in Chequers the following month, he did not mention the killings.

And there may be many reasons for the blindness to those and other atrocities of the Troubles. The families, not being political activists, may simply not have had the inclination to organise, initially. There were also no TV crews or photojournalists on hand to document the events, as there were in Derry the following year. And there were so many other killings that these 10 did not stand out quite so distinctly in those terrible times.

I still wince to recall the nights my taxi home from work was tracked through rifle sights by soldiers with blackened faces squatting in shop doorways on the Falls Road.

We all knew that others had been shot dead for failing to read a soldier’s order to stop. That’s what happened to William Ferris, who was in the back seat of a car, travelling home from work. This was also in internment week. The driver saw a soldier in front of him and thought he was waving him on. Two other men were shot dead in cars that week by soldiers who were wary of the movements they were making or the flashing of their lights.

And as we know, the IRA and loyalist paramilitaries were also killing people that week, the first week of a terrible period between the summers of 1971 and 1972 in which more would be killed than in any year since. There were two sectarian murders of Protestants by the IRA. These were William Atwell, killed by a nailbomb thrown into the Mackie’s factory in Belfast, and William Stronge in the Oldpark area, who was shot by a sniper while helping neighbours to move out of their home to safety.

Tuesday’s verdict in the inquest into the Ballymurphy massacre declared that the 10 people shot dead during British army operations were innocent,

unarmed civilians. Victims of [unjustified use of force](#). This is a vindication finally for the families of those killed.

Regardless of such damning judgments, the British government has previously signalled its intention to [end prosecutions](#) of soldiers suspected of murdering in Northern Ireland before the Good Friday agreement. It has also acknowledged the need for some kind of truth recovery process. Though in [the Queen's speech](#) the details were distinctly brief, [yesterday Boris Johnson](#) “apologised unreservedly on behalf of the UK government for the events that took place in Ballymurphy”. However, without a genuine effort to investigate all unresolved killings of the Troubles and sum up the past in a credible way, the only resort for the aggrieved continues to be separate, long campaigns for inquiries, new inquests and justice. Many grievances, deep and valid, will be overlooked.

Malachi O'Doherty is the author of The Year of Chaos: [Northern Ireland](#) on the Brink of Civil War, to be published later this year by Atlantic Books

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OpinionCoronavirus

Why we need an inspiring team talk to get us through the pandemic

Adrian Chiles



In moments of crisis or triumph, it's often the simplest message that means the most



Was it something he said? Ian McGeechan with Lions Paul Wallace and Gregor Townsend celebrate victory in 1997. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Was it something he said? Ian McGeechan with Lions Paul Wallace and Gregor Townsend celebrate victory in 1997. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 13 May 2021 02.00 EDT

I am a sucker for an inspiring team talk. With the announcement of the British and Irish Lions rugby squad for this summer's tour, I'm put in mind of the greatest team talk of all time. It was delivered by the Lions' coach, the softly spoken [Ian McGeechan](#), ahead of the key second test against South Africa in 1997. Every rugby fan will know what I am referring to; non-fans of rugby will wonder why on earth they should care. I'll get to that in a moment, but I came across a talk to rival McGeechan's this week.

Marking the death of the Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins, I interviewed Kevin Fong, presenter of the brilliant podcast [13 Minutes to the Moon](#). In it, we hear about the mission's flight director, Gene Kranz, and a speech he gave to his flight controllers in 1969 just before Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin began their descent to the lunar surface, which would see them, in Kranz's words, either land, abort or crash. "Look, we're about to do something nobody's ever done. We've trained for this all our lives; we're gonna do it. But I want to tell you all something: no matter how this turns

out, when we walk out of this room, we walk out as a team. Not as individuals.” A lot is made of solidarity, or lack thereof, in all sorts of contexts; perhaps that kind of speech would focus a few minds.

Going back to McGeechan’s speech to his Lions, there’s a line in it that keeps coming to me in this time of the virus. He says, of the sacrifices the players have made in their lives to be there: “When it comes to days like this, you know why you do it. You know why you’ve been involved. It’s been a privilege. It is a privilege. Because we have something special. As you meet in the street in 30 years’ time, there’ll just be a look, and you’ll know just how special some days in your life are.”

I get the same feeling about all of us being in this ghastly Covid business together. You might even argue that we’ve shown we’re made of something special to have come through it. And it’s certainly true that those of us still shuffling around in 30 years’ time will be able to share a look or word that says: yes, we were there.

Adrian Chiles is a Guardian columnist

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2021.05.13 - Around the world

- ['Weak' Lack of US sanctions let Saudis jail more dissidents, says rights group](#)
- [Pollution Study finds alarming levels of 'forever chemicals' in US mothers' breast milk](#)
- [Brazil Police target indigenous leaders after government criticism](#)
- [Business live Markets fall again as inflation worries rattle investors](#)
- [China County bans birthday parties for public servants in anti-corruption drive](#)

Global development

‘Weak’ US let Saudis jail more dissidents, says rights group

Lack of US sanctions on crown prince led to harsher sentences for critics of regime, Grant Liberty reports



Though a US report found Mohammed bin Salman authorised Jamal Khashoggi's murder, Joe Biden has not acted against the crown prince. Photograph: Bandar Algaloud/Reuters

Though a US report found Mohammed bin Salman authorised Jamal Khashoggi's murder, Joe Biden has not acted against the crown prince. Photograph: Bandar Algaloud/Reuters

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[Ruth Michaelson](#)

Thu 13 May 2021 03.00 EDT

The Biden administration's failure to impose sanctions on Saudi Arabia's crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has led to a increase in severe sentences for political prisoners in the kingdom, the Guardian can reveal.

The UK-based human rights organisation Grant Liberty found that twice as many harsh sentences had been meted out to Saudi prisoners of conscience in April than in the first three months of this year combined. It followed the Biden administration's decision on 26 February to [publish an intelligence report that showed](#) the crown prince, "approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey, to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi".



A vigil outside the Saudi embassy in Washington for the murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi. More dissidents were jailed after the US failed to act, said Grant Liberty. Photograph: Sarah Silbiger/Reuters

In the weeks since the US decision, Grant Liberty said it had seen a renewed crackdown on political prisoners and claimed there was a direct link to the American failure to impose sanctions on the crown prince or his close circle of advisers. It said the decision had given the Saudi authorities carte blanche to mete out severe punishments to critics.

“News from the Saudi legal system can be notoriously slow, but at least eight individuals suffered stiff sentences in April alone – twice as many as the first three months of the year combined,” it said. There were no prisoners of conscience sentenced in either April 2019 or April last year.

In late February, the Biden administration [announced](#) the “Khashoggi ban”, by denying visas to 76 Saudis “believed to have been engaged in threatening dissidents overseas, including but not limited to the Khashoggi killing”. But critics said these measures, which stopped short of imposing sanctions on the crown prince or those close to him, had done little to discourage the Saudi authorities from targeting critics.

Lucy Rae, of Grant Liberty, said: “The international community must demonstrate that the only way the kingdom can improve its standing is through genuine reform. That means we need the tough action [presidential] candidate Biden talked about, not the weakness President Biden has so far shown.”

Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, an aid worker who was one of the eight men sentenced in April, received a 20-year jail term and an additional 20-year travel ban for running a parody social media account. Abdulaziz Alaoudh al-Odah, who was arrested last September for his social media activity, was sentenced to five years in prison.

His nephew [Abdullah Alaoudh](#), son of the imprisoned cleric Salman al-Odah, as well as a pro-democracy activist at the Washington thinktank Democracy for the Arab World Now, said that the administration’s choice to publish the report aided accountability but little else. “It absolutely helped transparency, and helped us to know where responsibility lay, but accountability was completely lacking, and that’s what was at stake from the very beginning,” he said.

“The Biden administration knew this,” Alaoudh added. “But they manoeuvred, they wanted something light like the ‘Khashoggi ban’, and they made the symbolic gesture of talking not to the crown prince but instead to the king. What the prince took from all this is that everything [that Biden said] during the [presidential] campaign was just campaign talk, and therefore they won’t act on it.”

[Biden defends move not to punish Saudi crown prince over Khashoggi killing](#)

[Read more](#)

There are 22 prisoners of conscience who were sentenced for comments related to the kingdom’s former blockade of Qatar. Saudi Arabia’s relations with the tiny Gulf state have been warming. Qatar’s emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, [flew to Jeddah](#) on Monday evening to meet the crown prince, shortly after the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud, visited Qatar.

A spokesperson for the US Department of State said: “The United States’ commitment to democratic values and human rights is a priority, especially with our partners. We continue to elevate respect for human rights in our bilateral relations with [Saudi Arabia](#). As we have repeatedly made clear, peaceful activism to promote human rights is not a crime.”

The Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington did not respond when contacted for comment.

Alaoudh said that while the crown prince may be willing to shift on matters of foreign policy, he viewed control over free speech as a direct threat.

“You can normalise with everyone – [Qatar](#), Turkey, Iran – but not your own people because that means sharing decision-making, which for them is so dangerous,” he said. “Agreeing to some kind of political participation or power-sharing is an end to the absolute monarchy, which is all they know.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/13/weak-us-let-saudis-jail-more-dissidents-says-rights-group>

Pollution

Study finds alarming levels of ‘forever chemicals’ in US mothers’ breast milk

Toxic chemicals known as PFAS found in all 50 samples tested at levels nearly 2,000 times what is considered safe in drinking water



‘The study shows that PFAS contamination of breast milk is likely universal in the US,,’ said Erika Schreder, the report’s co-author. Photograph: Compassionate Eye Foundation/David Oxberry/Getty Images

‘The study shows that PFAS contamination of breast milk is likely universal in the US,,’ said Erika Schreder, the report’s co-author. Photograph: Compassionate Eye Foundation/David Oxberry/Getty Images

[Tom Perkins](#)

Thu 13 May 2021 01.00 EDT

A new study that checked American women’s breast milk for PFAS contamination detected the toxic chemical in all 50 samples tested, and at

levels nearly 2,000 times higher than the level some public health advocates advise is safe for drinking water.

The findings “are cause for concern” and highlight a potential threat to newborns’ health, the study’s authors say.

“The study shows that PFAS contamination of breast milk is likely universal in the US, and that these harmful chemicals are contaminating what should be nature’s perfect food,” said Erika Schreder, a co-author and science director with Toxic Free Future, a Seattle-based non-profit that pushes industry to find alternatives to the chemicals.

[Chemical giants hid dangers of ‘forever chemicals’ in food packaging](#)
[Read more](#)

PFAS, or per and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a class of about 9,000 compounds that are used to make products like food packaging, clothing and carpeting water and stain resistant. They are called “forever chemicals” because they do not naturally break down and have been found to accumulate in humans.

They are linked to cancer, birth defects, liver disease, thyroid disease, plummeting sperm counts and a range of other serious health problems.

The peer-reviewed study, [published on Thursday in the Environmental Science and Technology journal](#), found PFAS at levels in milk ranging from 50 parts per trillion (ppt) to more than 1,850ppt.

There are no standards for PFAS in breast milk, but the public health advocacy organization Environmental Working Group puts its advisory target for drinking water at 1ppt, and the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, within the Department of Health and Human Services, recommends as little as 14ppt in children’s drinking water.

Though researchers are concerned by the findings, newborns are difficult to study so there has not been a thorough analysis of how PFAS affect them, said Sheela Sathyanarayana, a co-author of the study and pediatrician with the University of Washington.

But she added that studies of older children and adults have linked the chemicals to hormonal disruptions and suggests PFAS harm the immune system, which could be especially problematic for infants because breast milk bolsters their immune system.

Though the study checked a relatively small sample size, the contamination cut across socioeconomic and geographic groupings, which is “what makes the issue so difficult on an individual level”, Sathyanarayana said.

“What it speaks to is that the chemicals are so ubiquitous that we can’t really predict who will have the highest exposures,” she added.

The study also runs counter to a chemical industry claim that its newer generation of PFAS that are still in use do not accumulate in humans. It found more than 12 kinds of compounds in about half of the samples, and 16 compounds overall, including several that are currently in use.

Evidence also suggests that the problem is getting worse. The study is the first in the US since 2005 to check breast milk samples, and shows an increase in the newer generation of PFAS, while older compounds that were phased out by industry are still present, and some at high levels.

The study also analyzed breast milk data from around the world and found PFAS detection frequency is increasing.

Among steps that the authors recommend pregnant women and mothers take to protect themselves are avoiding greaseproof carryout food packaging, stain guards like ScotchGard, waterproof clothing that uses PFAS, and cooking products with Teflon or similar non-stick properties, though manufacturers often do not disclose the chemicals’ use.

Moreover, the compounds’ ubiquity makes them all but impossible to avoid, and Schreder said that the best solution is a virtual ban of the entire chemical class, including those that industry claims do not accumulate as much in humans.

“The study provides more evidence that the PFAS that companies are currently using and putting into products are behaving like the ones they

phased out, and they're also getting into breast milk and exposing children at a very vulnerable phase of development," she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/13/pfas-forever-chemicals-breast-milk-us-study>.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Brazil](#)

Brazilian police target indigenous leaders after government criticism

Investigations into leaders closed after judges find no grounds for the cases and describe the situation as an ‘illegal embarrassment’



Sônia Guajajara is the head of Brazil's largest indigenous organization.
Photograph: Thomas Samson/AFP/Getty Images

Sônia Guajajara is the head of Brazil's largest indigenous organization.
Photograph: Thomas Samson/AFP/Getty Images

[Flávia Milhorange](#) in Rio de Janeiro

Thu 13 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Human rights activists in [Brazil](#) have warned that the country's authorities are targeting indigenous leaders after police launched investigations into two prominent critics of the government of Jair Bolsonaro.

Sônia Guajajara, the head of Brazil's largest indigenous organization, the Association of Indigenous Peoples (Apib), and Almir Suruí had been put under investigation last month over social media campaigns raising awareness of the threat that Covid-19 poses to Brazil's indigenous population.

Both cases were closed this week after federal judges ruled that there were no grounds for the investigations and described the situation as an "illegal embarrassment".

But Natalie Unterstell, the founder of the Política por Inteiro thinktank, said the episode exposed how the government is fostering violence against indigenous populations.

"Speeches by the president and his ministers are constantly attacking indigenous peoples," Unterstell said. "This sets an environment of violence. We need antidotes against it."

Guajajara described the investigation launched against her as "an attempt at intimidation and to avoid revealing the [government's] inaction [in response the pandemic.]"

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But both leaders were accused of spreading "fake news" by Funai, the government agency which is officially responsible for protecting indigenous interests. In a statement, Funai said it would not comment on the investigation.

"It is scary to receive a subpoena from the police for a complaint made by Funai itself. This is unprecedented. It is Bolsonaro's new Funai, which has completely reversed its role of protecting indigenous peoples," Guajajara added.

Apib lodged complaints this week with the supreme court and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, over what it described as the Bolsonaro government's "persecution" of indigenous people.

Unterstell, who tracks climate policy in Brazil, said other indigenous people and environmental activists have been investigated for criticising the government.

“These are not isolated cases: others have been summoned by the police in similar circumstances,” said Unterstell, the founder of the Política por Inteiro thinktank. “It is important to note that levels of civic freedom are going down in Brazil.”

According to indigenous leaders, Funai has also targeted people working at its regional units and requested information about donations to Apib and other organisations during the pandemic.

The cases against Guajajara and Suruí were opened just days after Bolsonaro pledged to the international community that he would make efforts to address tribal rights.

Under increasing international pressure to slow down deforestation in the Amazon and to open a dialogue with indigenous communities, the president struck a conciliatory tone at the climate summit convened by Joe Biden in late April.

But soon after, the president [approved](#) a 24% cut to the environment ministry’s budget and highlighted, during a [livestream](#), the plans to open indigenous territories to mining. Marcelo Xavier, the head of Funai, who took part in the broadcast, supported the president’s views.

The investigation into Guajajara focuses on a multimedia [web series](#) produced by indigenous groups, and featuring indigenous leaders and international celebrities, including the actor Alec Baldwin and singer Caetano Veloso. It was a part of an international fundraising campaign to help fight Covid-19, which has [disproportionately affected](#) Brazil’s indigenous people.

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China

Chinese county bans birthday parties for public servants

Housewarmings banned and limits imposed on weddings and funerals in anti-corruption drive



Birthday parties, housewarmings and other banquet celebrations are banned under the measures in Funing county. Photograph: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Birthday parties, housewarmings and other banquet celebrations are banned under the measures in Funing county. Photograph: Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

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Thu 13 May 2021 05.13 EDT

Authorities in a Chinese county have banned public servants and Communist party members from having birthday parties, housewarmings and other banquet celebrations.

Authorities in Funing county, in Yunnan province, also put caps on weddings and funerals, limiting guest numbers and food budgets. The measures, seemingly targeted at potential corruption, include bans on using official vehicles for business or collecting gifts and cash that are “obviously higher [value] than normal reciprocity”.

Party members and public servants were also ordered to dial back on extravagant weddings and funerals. Wedding motorcades must not contain more than 10 vehicles, and receptions must not exceed 20 tables or a total guest list of 200. The guest list and wedding cost must be reported to authorities prior to the event, and gifts are limited to values no higher than the previous year’s per capita disposable income of Funing’s urban residents.

Funerals should be simple and frugal, the [directive](#) said, with fewer wreaths and less burning of fake money. “During the funeral, it is strictly forbidden to hire crying teams, art teams, or lion dance teams to carry out memorial activities,” it said.

The measures were being implemented to “carry forward the fine style of hard work and thrift, cultivate and practise socialist core values, and to create a good urban and rural landscape of thriftiness, civility, and honesty,” officials said.

Weddings and funerals are often seen as signifiers of social standing and have become increasingly extravagant affairs. China’s central government has long called for citizens to restrain festivities in the name of frugality or to [curb behaviour deemed dangerous](#).

In March, state media [reported](#) that several counties in Henan, Jiangxi and Shandong provinces had issued guidelines or rules in line with a pledge [by the civil affairs ministry](#) to mobilise community organisations to develop more modest alternatives, including group weddings.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2021.05.16 \[Sun, 16 May 2021\]](#)

[2021.05.16 - Opinion](#)

[Less of the backstory, Angela Rayner, it's beginning to wear a bit thin](#)

[The Observer view on the Israel-Palestine conflict](#)

[The Observer view on the spread of the Indian variant in the UK](#)

[Covid puts Boris Johnson in check – cartoon](#)

[There's a time and a place for trees – don't transplant them for our amusement](#)

[Lovely eulogies to Fleet Street's John Kay, but they overlook one important fact](#)

[Do people believe Covid myths?](#)

[Dua Lipa reminds fans of the thrills of live music](#)

[Letters: one good reason not to have babies](#)

[For the record](#)

[Manchester City play beautiful football but it masks the ugliness of their owners](#)

[Headlines saturday 15 may 2021](#)

[Coronavirus India variant could seriously disrupt lifting of lockdown, says Boris Johnson](#)

[Analysis India variant could lead to serious third wave in UK](#)

[Indian variant Which countries have highest infection rates?](#)

[Explained What England can do to combat the Indian variant](#)

[2021.05.15 - Coronavirus](#)

[Live Coronavirus news: England to continue lockdown easing; Taiwan raises Covid alert; Australia runs first repatriation flight from India](#)

[Taiwan Country records 180 new cases in island's worst outbreak of pandemic](#)

[WHO Vaccinate vulnerable global poor before children in rich countries](#)

[Australia How a proudly multicultural country became a pandemic fortress](#)

2021.05.15 - Spotlight

'He grabbed the lead and said: give me the dog' Can pet detectives stop the rise in animal theft?

Cush Jumbo 'He's doing less screen time but being paid three times more? Er, no!'

'Have a little empathy' Bali tires of badly behaved foreign influencers

Hamlet! James Bond! Lady Gaga! The cultural events we've waited too long for

2021.05.15 - Opinion

From Edward VIII to James Dyson: the yacht that tells a tale of British wealth

The Green party can show Labour how to connect with its former heartlands

Marriage doesn't work (just ask Bill and Melinda) – so let me present some alternatives

Once this violence in Israel and Gaza ends, there can be no return to 'normal'

2021.05.15 - Around the world

Marjorie Taylor Greene AOC calls Republican 'deeply unwell' after 2019 video surfaces

China Tornadoes kill 10 and injure hundreds

'I was blown away' Divers haul 200lb of trash from Lake Tahoe in a day

Mars China lands unmanned spacecraft on red planet for first time

Australia Dingo fence to be built on Fraser Island after attacks on children

Headlines friday 14 may 2021

Gaza Strip Israel air and ground forces hit targets as death toll climbs

Live Israel launches fresh Gaza attacks amid rocket fire

'More than a reaction to rockets' Israel violence spreads

Analysis Violence and mayhem offer Netanyahu refuge

2021.05.14 - Coronavirus

Live Coronavirus: Japan prefectures to declare emergency;

Ireland's health IT systems suffer ransomware attack

[Self-isolation Boost payments or risk Covid resurgence, experts say](#)

[Pfizer Delay in giving second jabs of vaccine improves immunity, says study](#)

['It's a minefield' US restaurant workers leave industry over Covid](#)

[2021.05.14 - Spotlight](#)

['Bristol does things differently' Green party emerges as city's rising force](#)

[Pedro Almodóvar and Tilda Swinton I love the idea of the woman on the edge of the abyss](#)

[Experience I'm allergic to water](#)

[The startling film about Stalin's funeral It's impossible to take your eyes off this infinitely dear face](#)

[2021.05.14 - Opinion](#)

[The online safety bill will show just how blurred the boundaries of free speech are](#)

[The violence that began at Jerusalem's ancient holy sites is driven by a distinctly modern zeal](#)

[Remaking Myanmar's devastated economy is the key for a future democracy](#)

[If people don't get paid to self-isolate, UK Covid cases could rise again](#)

[2021.05.14 - Around the world](#)

[Ethiopia Rape is being used as weapon of war, say witnesses](#)

[Tigray conflict 'Bodies are being eaten by hyenas; girls of eight raped': inside the Tigray conflict](#)

[India Eighteen elephants found dead in forest reserve](#)

[Havana syndrome US officials confirm 130 incidents of mysterious brain injury](#)

[Headlines thursday 13 may 2021](#)

[Middle East Israel's army drafts Gaza ground operation plan as mob violence escalates](#)

['All I saw was fire' Rockets shatter sense of safety in Tel Aviv](#)

[Tel Aviv TV shows 'lynch' mob attacking motorist](#)

[Analysis Weapons boast may come back to haunt Hamas](#)

2021.05.13 - Coronavirus

'Hell on earth' Bereaved families on the battle for a Covid inquiry

Working from home Guidance to end in England on 21 June, Johnson indicates

Study Emphasis on personal benefits may be best way to fight vaccine scepticism

Covid vaccines More frequent side-effects reported mixing Pfizer and Oxford jabs, study suggests

2021.05.13 - Spotlight

Tracey Emin on beating cancer You can curl up and die – or you can get on with it

The long read Cruel, paranoid, failing: inside the Home Office

No visitors but teeming with life What's going on inside the Natural History Museum?

The Guardian picture essay From London to Beijing on the old Silk Road

2021.05.13 - Opinion

That wasn't quite the resounding Conservative election victory it seemed

If the government is serious about 'global Britain', why is it cutting research funding?

The Ballymurphy verdict shows the need to examine the unresolved killings of the Troubles

Why we need an inspiring team talk to get us through the pandemic

2021.05.13 - Around the world

'Weak' Lack of US sanctions let Saudis jail more dissidents, says rights group

Pollution Study finds alarming levels of 'forever chemicals' in US mothers' breast milk

Brazil Police target indigenous leaders after government criticism

Business live Markets fall again as inflation worries rattle investors

[China County bans birthday parties for public servants in anti-corruption drive](#)