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How creative of the Tories to invent a culture war to disguise arts cuts

[Barbara Ellen](#)



Everyone is the poorer when scientists are pitted against artists by the morally bankrupt



Jarvis Cocker, performing with Pulp in 1995, has opposed the cuts.
Photograph: Mick Hutson/Redferns

Jarvis Cocker, performing with Pulp in 1995, has opposed the cuts.
Photograph: Mick Hutson/Redferns

Sat 8 May 2021 12.00 EDT

The arts are being screwed over. Again. If we keep allowing this to happen, there will be an atrophying of the national soul the like of which the UK has never seen. The added insult is that this latest round of cultural vandalism is being wreaked under the guise of a bogus battle between the arts on one side and science, medicine and technology on the other.

A consultation by the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, and the Office for Students (which distributes funding) proposes almost [halving a stream of higher education funding](#) (£36m to £19m), meaning universities will lose millions for subjects such as music, drama, dance and art and design, as well as media studies and archaeology.

The Department for Education says the cuts relate to additional funding and will only affect some subjects. It says that arts subjects aren't "strategic priorities" and that reforms will benefit "scientific/medical subjects", targeting "taxpayers' money towards the subjects which support the skills

this country needs to build back better... those that support the NHS, high-cost STEM subjects”. In other words, the government is trying to turn this into a cultural cage fight, of (valid, crucial) scientists, computer students, nurses and the like versus (self-indulgent, feckless, elitist) drama students, artists and archaeologists. Not only that, a cage fight without end; Williamson said that he would “potentially seek further reductions” to funding such courses in future years.

Understandably, there’s [uproar](#) from the artistic community, with Pulp’s Jarvis Cocker saying that the proposed cuts made art education seem “expendable” and unimportant, when it isn’t. Certainly, it’s confusing to see one of this nation’s greatest assets – its powerful international cultural appeal (music alone generates billions) – chopped off at the ankles. Right now (after Brexit and the pandemic), the arts scene cannot sustain such major blows, especially when they mostly affect disadvantaged students. For years, there’s been a systemic erosion of working-class participation in the arts and this represents another big chunk off a crumbling cliff. Then there are the consumers. These kinds of cuts might first affect those involved in the arts, but ultimately they make everyone’s lives culturally poorer.

The government knows this and that’s why it’s emotively and cynically dragging the NHS into it. That’s why separate vocations/skill sets such as acting and medicine are being pitted against each other as an either/or deal. Perhaps there are scientists who feel engaged in a funding grudge match against dancers, just as there may be sculptors who feel in competition with nurses, but I doubt it.

It seems clear that arts subjects are being placed in false competition with these other valuable areas in order to reframe an outrage as practicality and necessity. In truth, the arts have always stood alone and should always stand alone. When it comes to the arts versus medicine, science or computing, it’s not a question of what do you choose or even how do you choose. Rather, it’s: why are we being asked to do so?

Why ‘boozy lockdown Britain’ is no laughing matter



The pubs were closed but alcohol could be bought cheaply and in bulk in supermarkets. Photograph: David Kilpatrick / Alamy/Alamy

Drinking to tackle the tedium and isolation of lockdown wasn't a joke for some. The Office for National Statistics reports that deaths directly related to alcohol rose to a [20-year high](#) in England and Wales during the pandemic, up 20% in 2020 from 2019. The death rate started to rise during the first lockdown and increased each quarter. Of 7,423 deaths in 2020, people succumbed to liver disease and mental and behavioural disorders caused by alcohol or accidental alcohol poisoning.

Then there's the socio-economic element: men were more likely to die generally, but especially disadvantaged men, who were four times more likely to die than those from affluent areas. Likewise, disadvantaged women were three times more likely to die than those from wealthy areas. The deaths are thought mainly to be of higher-risk drinkers already consuming large amounts of alcohol. Some people returned to drinking in lockdown after managing to give up.

You don't have to be a card-carrying party-pooper to find this grim reading. Of course pubs and bars were mainly closed, but alcohol could still be bought cheaply and in bulk at supermarkets and online. While some people

gave up alcohol during the pandemic, the stress could have made others drink far more and far more frequently.

Do charities and help groups have a point when they despair about the easy availability of cheap, high-strength alcohol? Should greater efforts have been made to warn people to monitor their intake, instead of treating “boozy lockdown Britain” as a bit of a joke? Experts call the ONS figures a “wake-up call” for the government, and appeal for addiction services to be given the resources to tackle what is a growing problem. Perhaps it will only be once the pandemic stabilises, and we all stumble into the light, that we’ll truly be able to see what state we’re in.

Sorry, Ipswich Town, but the rest of us are at peak Sheeran



Ed Sheeran watches his team play Sheffield United. Photograph: Rob Howarth/Getty Images

What has football done to deserve Ed Sheeran? Not content with dominating music with his “signature” (bland-core?) sound, Sheeran has moved into sport, [signing a deal](#) to sponsor the shirts of the men’s and women’s teams of Ipswich Town, the League One club he has always supported.

Positives. The shirts will not be emblazoned with his name but with symbols from his album titles and the word “TOUR”. There’s not enough space on the shirts for Sheeran to humblebrag about his friendships with the likes of Taylor Swift. Ipswich Town are presumably delighted and grateful to have the deal. Nor is Sheeran the first musician to become involved with his favourite football club – from Elton John and Watford FC to the Libertines and Margate FC, the pop-football bond is real.

Still, back off, Sheeran. You’re already everywhere in popular culture. After Earth is obliterated by nuclear Armageddon, footage will be found of Sheeran with James Corden performing Carpool Karaoke and scientists of the future will decide that, on this evidence, humanity had it coming to them.

Sheeran also bought up half the village, including a pub, in his home place, Framlingham, Suffolk. Now he’s on the local football strips. Where will it end? All the best to Ipswich Town, but the “Ed-creep” is strong here.

Barbara Ellen is an Observer columnist

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[OpinionElections 2021](#)

The Observer view on Labour's performance in last week's elections

[Observer editorial](#)

Keir Starmer must decide who the party exists for and then persuade them to vote for it



Keir Starmer: 'It is always difficult for a leader of the opposition to get heard so soon after the election of a new PM.' Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Keir Starmer: 'It is always difficult for a leader of the opposition to get heard so soon after the election of a new PM.' Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Sun 9 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The national mood is critical in determining the outcome of [elections](#). Usually, we apply a calculation of economic satisfaction: has life got harder or easier in recent years and who do voters hold responsible? But in the extraordinary circumstances of a pandemic, the public sentiment towards the government has been understandably shaped by what voters make of the

way it has handled matters of life and death. Right now, there is a palpable sense of relief as we appear to be re-emerging from the trauma of the past 16 months, with its terrible death toll and painful lockdowns. The [vaccine rollout](#) is continuing apace and far more successfully than in many other countries, infection rates are low and it feels as if life is gradually approaching something close to normal.

[2021 election: latest results from local, Scottish and Welsh votes](#)
[Read more](#)

The Conservatives were always going to benefit from this shift in the national mood; so have the Scottish and Welsh incumbent governments, with the SNP and [Welsh Labour](#) generally regarded by voters to have handled the pandemic well. While the Tories may have been in power for more than a decade, the country returned an 80-seat majority for Boris Johnson just 18 months ago, based on his “get Brexit done” campaign and his appeal as a fresh start, running as much against his Conservative predecessors as the opposition. Why would the voters who supported him change their allegiance so soon? The vaccine bounce has eclipsed concerns about the fumbled handling of the pandemic, Johnson delivered Brexit as promised and voters may feel it is too early to judge the government’s success on the other things that motivated them to support him.

That is the context in which Labour’s performance in the local and mayoral elections in England should be evaluated. It is difficult for a leader of the opposition [to be heard](#) so soon after the election of a new prime minister to whom voters delivered a resounding majority and who is broadly considered to be performing well. The expectation that Labour could transform its fortunes just 18 months after its historic 2019 defeat, its [worst showing](#) in almost 100 years, was always unrealistic.

But neither do the results suggest that Sir Keir Starmer has started to address the reasons for defeat, beyond succeeding a deeply unpopular leader in Jeremy Corbyn. The challenges facing Labour in England are immense and long pre-date Corbyn or Brexit. Labour has been losing support among working-class voters more quickly than among professionals for [two decades](#). Initially, many of those voters stayed at home or lent smaller parties

support, but since Brexit the Conservatives have successfully attracted them to their [electoral coalition](#).

Age and education level have become increasingly salient as predictors of voting behaviour in the last decade: younger university graduates are more likely to vote [Labour](#), older homeowners on average incomes to support the Tories. Brexit has accelerated this realignment of English politics but is better understood as a symptom than a cause. [Labour](#) cannot win under first past the post without building a broad electoral coalition, but the divisions within that historic coalition – between socially liberal voters more likely to have supported Remain and socially conservative voters more likely to have supported Leave – have become more significant than their shared values on the economy. There was no position on Brexit that would have avoided losing the party votes.

And Labour is more disadvantaged by this realignment than the Conservatives, because its votes tend to be concentrated in cities such as London, Liverpool and Manchester, whereas the Conservatives have become a competitive electoral force across much bigger parts of the country that include swaths of former Labour heartlands. There are no quick fixes to this conundrum. But, worryingly, under Starmer's leadership these trends appear to be continuing to erode the Labour vote. There is evidence of a squeeze on both sides: Labour also lost votes [to the Greens](#) and Liberal Democrats in some areas. While our first-past-the-post electoral system will prevent a dramatic implosion, Labour could have further to fall; across the continent, many [social democratic parties](#) are engaged in a struggle for survival.

It is early days, but Starmer has not made enough progress in edging Labour back to electability. Externally, he should have been able to show voters that he understands why so many rejected Labour in 2019 and their aspirations and concerns in 2021: this is the first building block in the articulation of an alternative vision for the country. But Starmer appears to be a poor communicator who lacks an instinctive touch; the same can be said for too many of his top team. His attempt to adopt the [patriotism of the flag](#) came across as inauthentically formulaic; like Ed Miliband, too much of his language is technical and wonky rather than resonant. Internally, in the name of party unity, he has shied away from addressing hard truths with his membership about the need to speak from beyond the activist comfort zone.

These are the things he needs to prioritise; without this foundation, Labour's attempts to set out what it stands for are bound to fall flat. That one of Starmer's first actions was needlessly sacking Angela Rayner last night as party chair, one of Labour's most senior women and more able communicators, calls into question his judgment.

The Conservatives have a dreadful track record in government; the Brexit they have delivered risks widening regional inequalities and making people's lives more difficult in the years to come. But Labour needs to earn the right to set out an alternative in the eyes of voters and Thursday's results show it has not yet achieved that on anything like the scale it needs to. The existential questions that hang over Labour – who does the party exist to represent and how can it build a sufficiently diverse electoral coalition of voters to win under the Westminster electoral system as the electorate realigns – are not new but they are ones Starmer needs to make a better start at answering. No government can defy electoral gravity forever: eventually, the public mood will shift against Johnson's Conservatives. What is by no means guaranteed in a shifting electorate is that that support will automatically transfer to Labour. Starmer must do more to explain to the public what a Labour government would achieve for Britain.

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OpinionFishing industry

The Observer view on Boris Johnson's role in the fishing row

Observer editorial

The prime minister's claim that he is defending British fishers rings hollow in light of his Brexit deal



A French fisherman unloads seafood boxes from a boat in Jersey last week.
Photograph: Sameer Al-Doumy/The Observer

A French fisherman unloads seafood boxes from a boat in Jersey last week.
Photograph: Sameer Al-Doumy/The Observer

Sun 9 May 2021 01.30 EDT

Oh, what a lovely war! The summer silly season arrived early for the Brexiters and their Fleet Street cheerleaders, and didn't they enjoy it! In a week that commemorated the death of Napoleon, and on the eve of today's Europe Day, which celebrates peace and unity across a continent for which

greater generations of Britons fought and died, they picked a [foolish scrap](#) with the French for old times' sake, then claimed a spurious victory.

It sometimes seems nothing changes, which is just how Little Englanders like it. The sad thing is, they do not realise how very stupid – and deeply insular – they make Britain appear to the rest of the world. Thousands are dying each day in India. Real battles threaten communities around the globe. But what's the big news for foreigner-baiting tabloids? The imaginary “Battle of St Helier”, a fake story told with sick relish, bad puns and shameful jingoism.

Let's be clear. Boris Johnson gives not a fig for fish or fishers. From [Cornwall](#) to [Scotland](#), Britain's fisheries, which he vowed to protect, are being laid waste by his deceitful, damaging Brexit deal.

This same disastrous policy is imperilling Jersey's fishers, whose access to traditional markets in France and beyond is obstructed by a seawall of paperwork. Far from making them captains of their fate, [Brexit is sinking them fast](#).

French skippers who sailed to Jersey to protest about restrictive new licences in waters many of them have fished for generations are Johnson's victims, too. Maybe some of them filled in the forms incorrectly. Perhaps the St Helier authorities failed to consult. It's certain some French politicians absurdly over-reacted. But that's all fixable. What cannot be fixed, regrettably, is the [Brexit](#) deal, the root cause of all these woes.

Yet Johnson, Brexit's chief architect, has the effrontery to claim he is sticking up for British fishers against the cruel depredations of the French. Waving the flag, he sends in the Royal Navy, escalating the affair beyond all reason. And then, when the French sensibly go home, he smirkingly bows to the applause of grateful newsdesks.

Is this truly the level to which honest policymaking, sound political judgment and measured decision-making in Britain have sunk? It would appear so. It is entirely of a piece with what has gone before. Everyone, even [Arlene Foster](#), now realises Johnson lied about a border in the Irish Sea. Day

by day, the people of Northern Ireland pay the price in economic instability and violence.

Johnson's attempts to wriggle out of agreements he himself made with the EU flout international law, damage Britain's reputation and undermine trust. Little wonder Brussels and Paris reacted the way they did last week. For the first time in living memory, they face a British populist-nationalist demagogue who would rather appease his followers than stick to the truth. He is a national liability. Britain did not win the "Battle of St Helier". The dispute is far from over. Jersey and Normandy fishers continue to suffer. Protesters may try to block UK exports at French ports, adding to the regulatory chaos caused by post-Brexit rules.

And just wait until Britain starts imposing licensing and other [checks on EU imports](#) from 1 January. This, writ large, is what Jersey is trying to do now. When that moment arrives, Johnson will have a real battle on his hands.

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[Observer comment cartoon](#)

[Keir Starmer](#)

Keir Starmer's red wall – cartoon

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NotebookJudith Kerr

Judith Kerr was right, time flies for adults, but childhood lasts half a lifetime

Tim Adams



My daughter's 18th birthday left me reflecting on the author's wise words about experience and memory



Judith Kerr: 'The second half is all the years to follow.' Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP via Getty Images

Judith Kerr: 'The second half is all the years to follow.' Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP via Getty Images

Sun 9 May 2021 02.00 EDT

My younger daughter celebrated her 18th birthday last week and I was reminded of something that the great children's writer [Judith Kerr](#) said to me, well into her own 95th and final year: "We live our lives in two distinct halves," she said, over lunch, with all her twinkling brightness intact. "The first half lasts until we are 18 and the second is all the years that follow."

Kerr, who grew up in Berlin and escaped the Nazis to England, had more reason than most to think of her childhood lasting as long as the subsequent 77 years, but her perception is more universally true.

Science offers a couple of objective explanations for time accelerating as we age. One shows how the brain literally gets slower at perception in adulthood and therefore progressively processes less of life. Another proves that we naturally encode only new experiences, but not familiar ones, into memory, which explains why in later life many of us can recall our school

classrooms or our first drink and kiss (usually in that order) better than almost anything that happened six months ago.

In childhood and adolescence, we encounter countless novelties; as adults, we experience fewer unfamiliar moments and less time is stored away. I'm not, therefore, wrong in feeling it is only five minutes since my daughter was taking her first magical steps in the world – or that in those minutes she has crammed in enough experiences to last half a lifetime.

Two cultures



UAL alumnus: Helen McCrory performs in *Uncle Vanya* in New York in 2003. Photograph: Matthew Peyton/Getty Images

The *Observer's* offices are near two of London's most striking recent buildings, the [Francis Crick Institute](#) and the [Central St Martins](#) campus of the University of the Arts. The former is a world leader in biomedical research, the latter in cutting-edge design, art, drama and music. To walk past either – in more normal times – is to experience a vicarious shiver of curiosity at the busyness and invention going on inside, a sense that the future is under construction. The proposal last week from the education minister, Gavin Williamson, [to cut by 50%](#) the amount spent on “high cost”

higher education arts subjects reinforces the belief that his government is interested in only one half of that future.

Under his plan, student spending for non-science and health subjects will be slashed from £36m to £19m, with more cuts to follow. Institutions such as University of the [Arts](#) London will lose nearly £4m. “Our proposed reforms are designed to target taxpayers’ money towards the subjects which support the skills this country needs to build back better,” runs the government explanation.

Presumably that rebuilding places scant value on the lucrative talents of, say, [Helen McCrory](#), Alexander McQueen, Katharine Hamnett, Terence Conran or thousands of other distinguished [alumni of UAL](#).

Intent on pursuing its culture wars, the government seems happy to overlook the fact that the [creative industries added £115bn](#) to the UK economy in 2019, or more than 100 times that of the [fishing industry](#) for which it seems so keen to [go into battle](#).

Cold comfort



Nancy Mitford: still relevant, alas. Photograph: PA/PA Archive/Press Association Ima

TV adaptations of Nancy Mitford's *The Pursuit of Love* have been produced at 20-year intervals, since the first series aired in 1980. [Another](#), directed by Emily Mortimer, begins on BBC1 tonight. Even Mitford might have imagined that, by now, her pitch-perfect insider's view of the venality and snobberies of a perennially entitled English ruling class might have felt like an amusing period piece. Sadly, as ever, many of her observations feel bang up to date.

Tim Adams is an Observer columnist

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The weekly stats uncoveredCoronavirus

How good are we at predicting the pandemic?

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

Models have been useful, especially as humans are far too optimistic and confident



A woman cycles past a rainbow graffiti in support of the NHS in London's Soho in May 2020 – modelling by Imperial College is credited with provoking the full national lockdown. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

A woman cycles past a rainbow graffiti in support of the NHS in London's Soho in May 2020 – modelling by Imperial College is credited with provoking the full national lockdown. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Sun 9 May 2021 03.00 EDT

Epidemiological models have been a source of continual controversy from the start of the pandemic, often blamed for fearmongering and inaccuracy.

How well have they done?

Perhaps the most famous piece of modelling came from [Neil Ferguson's team](#) at Imperial College London in March 2020, credited with provoking the full national lockdown. Unfortunately, there are repeated [claims](#) they estimated 510,000 deaths in Great Britain over two years, but that was a projection under the implausible scenario that nothing was done about the virus. Their model was, if anything, rather optimistic. Even short of a full lockdown, they projected maximum deaths in Great Britain of fewer than 50,000 and the actual total has been far higher.

In July 2020, a “[reasonable worst case scenario](#)” predicted 85,000 UK Covid deaths up to 31 March 2021. This seemed pessimistic at the time but, in part due to the unforeseen “Kent” variant, the truth turned out to be rather worse than the “worst case”, with about 95,000 deaths.

In contrast, when a second lockdown was being contemplated in October 2020, there were leaked projections of a possible peak of 4,000 deaths a day. These outputs were not meant for release and had already been revised down.

Can human predictions do better? In early April 2020, [DS and his colleagues](#) asked 140 UK experts and more than 2,000 non-experts for quantitative predictions. Experts gave a median estimate of 30,000 Covid deaths by the end of the year, whereas the non-experts said 20,000. The truth was around 75,000; this value was in only a third of the experts' prediction intervals and in only 10% of the non-experts'. People were both far too optimistic and confident, a common finding.

In the words of statistician George Box, “all models are wrong, but some are useful”. Epidemic models are always full of uncertainty. That uncertainty flows from their simplified structure, their assumptions and data inputs and the unpredictability of real life. Provided we view these models as tools for our understanding, they still can be useful.

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

[Opinion](#)Cornwall

Rise up, Cornwall, against London's SUV drivers lusting for a second home

[Catherine Bennett](#)



A pandemic-inspired bidding frenzy has spurred residents to resist the invasion



The 2019 film Bait explored tensions in a Cornish coastal community.
Photograph: CAP/RFS/Image supplied by Capital Pictures

The 2019 film Bait explored tensions in a Cornish coastal community.
Photograph: CAP/RFS/Image supplied by Capital Pictures

Sun 9 May 2021 02.30 EDT

As the longer-term psychological and social impacts of Covid begin to reveal themselves, one substantial group is already displaying a mental shift that could inflict lasting damage if only, mercifully, on other people. The pandemic did not merely change this demographic, it inspired in its members an identical quest: they must own property in [Cornwall](#).

With infections subsiding, the fixation has only intensified: searches for property in Cornwall, [at 5m in a month](#), have overtaken those for London. Estate agents struggle with the demand, maybe 60 inquiries per house, with places bought unseen, rival bids, the rental market also [soaring beyond local means](#) and ostensibly unalluring properties sold in hours or less. A [local headline](#) announces: “Port Isaac bungalow sells in just five minutes as Cornwall housing madness continues.” A bigger, £4.5m house in Polzeath, no matter that its beach is indelibly associated with a [glistening David Cameron](#), secured an offer from buyers who’d only seen it online.

The competition is all the more striking given a parallel series of news stories depicting heightened local resistance to the arrival, quite likely in an outsize SUV, of yet more price-inflating and largely absentee second-home owners. Before that, Mark Jenkin's acclaimed 2019 film, [Bait](#), exploring tensions in a Cornish coastal community, might have generated in some buyers an awareness of what their new acquisition could permanently displace. Perhaps local disquiet is a small price for convenient beach access from a "lock up and leave", as estate agents call properties whose main message to neighbours is, however, fuck off and die.

In lockdown, the arrival of wealthy plague-dodgers prompted [open hostility](#) and a Facebook group called "[You Shouldn't Be Here](#)". A defiant [Gordon Ramsay](#) was noted in his Land Rover Defender ("[tough, capable, unstoppable](#)"). More recently, a Cornish resident [told the Guardian](#) about "people who have moved in with loads of money who think they own everything". A sign in Malpas: "Respect Malpas and double yellow lines. Park legally and properly. If not, bugger off." In St Agnes: "No more second homes, our village is dying!!" Steve Ridholls reportedly [put that up](#) after a "cocksure" visitor came to view next door. "I saw him looking and thought, 'you greedy bastard', I bet it wouldn't even be his primary residence." In short, mutinous Cornwall residents are becoming a reproach, perhaps a model, to more passive witnesses to limitless countrywide gentrification and the associated posturing. It's not only around Falmouth and Rock that the unspeakable and seemingly unembarrassable like to advertise their arrival: a recent [survey](#) confirmed that 75% of SUV owners do not live in unpredictable terrain but are affluent city dwellers and, in particular, residents of Kensington, Chelsea and Fulham.

As for the ongoing local displacement and escalating [prices](#) that accompany raging second home fever, that pattern, too, is replicated everywhere adequately picturesque: if a blameless Cornwall neighbourhood woke one day to the spectacle of David Cameron, well, villagers in Bruton in Somerset have discovered they now live, like some similarly blessed regions of Suffolk and Oxfordshire, in rural Notting Hill. "This is a microcosm of the poshest parts of London transported to one of the most beautiful parts of the country," the [Guardian learned](#), after George Osborne bought in.

Whether Cornwall communities are less cooperative or simply more at risk, their indignation underlines how elsewhere, second home acquisition, even amid acute housing shortages, has not merely escaped the condemnation visited on other offences against bucolic harmony but also any fiscal penalties commensurate with the social costs. Lockdown-driven visitors to beauty spots were disparaged for ignorant tombstoning, for mess, for all sorts of temporary nuisance to the point of these clueless townies being offered a [“refreshed” countryside code](#) instructing them to “share the space” and act nice. Be sure, for instance, to say hello to Cameron if you spot him trailing bodyguards in north Cornwall or, since one second-home colony never seems to be enough, catching up with rustic investment news in [Chipping Norton](#).

In contrast, the irreversible legacy of incomers’ housing deals, some made with all the careful consideration of choices off a tasting menu, is tolerated by a largely second home-favourable press given to extensive coverage of the acquisition and hilariously eventful maintenance of its contributors’ supplementary properties. Still more usefully, governments composed of [second home-owners](#) have been unfailingly loyal. Earlier, Rishi Sunak [actively subsidised](#) holiday-home buyers by [reducing stamp duty](#); when mass tourism and hospitality closed down, the [“Stanley Johnson loophole”](#) ministered to private second-home owners for whom separation from their properties would be unendurable. New absentee owners may find, as a scenic investment bonus, that their [council tax](#) is actually less than for those full-time locals yet to be herded humanely out.

That so few affected residents or about-to-be-exiles have so far organised around, say, a hypothecated, deterrently astronomical council tax – or even Cornwall-style sign-writing – is harder to comprehend. Unless it’s the “perennial and unfailing kindness of the poor to the rich”, noted by GK Chesterton, quoted in Ferdinand Mount’s *Mind the Gap*. Maybe it helps that darkened cottages in denatured villages, unlike status-signalling vehicles or illegally erected extensions or skateboard parks, are less immediately identifiable as egregiously antisocial. Maybe, as with the normalisation of massive SUVs in narrow, already polluted London streets, resistance just comes to feel pointless.

There is always, too, that reluctance to be targeted with the *Daily Mail*'s all-purpose retort, the "politics of envy", even if that charge more routinely testifies to the accuser's incomprehension that anyone, other than a mad puritanical loser, could complain of something (say, grotesquely inflated rents and house prices in economically deprived areas) on principle. But as some [Manchester United fans](#) decided last week of their own plutocrat problem, "there's only so much passive resistance can do". And the alternative is Cornwall.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[Names in the news](#)Television

Paddy McGuinness: watching people telling lies is oddly irresistible

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



The host of I Can Hear Your Voice has turned no-way TV into a must-see-every-Saturday-night hit show



Paddy McGuinness: host of BBC1's latest Saturday night effort. Photograph: Kieron McCarron/PA

Paddy McGuinness: host of BBC1's latest Saturday night effort. Photograph: Kieron McCarron/PA

Sat 8 May 2021 10.00 EDT

It seems, lately, that whenever a television show arrives promising a brave new format, my first thought is: "There's no way I'm watching that."

I had it with [*The Masked Singer*](#). I had it with [*The Wall*](#), the quiz show where Danny Dyer prowls along the bottom of a giant, upturned pinball machine and talks dirty to the big balls.

And I had it with [*I Can Hear Your Voice*](#), BBC1's latest Saturday night effort, hosted by Paddy McGuinness, where people lip-sync to someone singing in what may or may not be their own voice. The contestants and panel then have to decide if that person really does sound like Idina Menzel or if they're more like garden foxes in mating season.

"There's no way I'm watching that," I said three weeks ago. Two weeks ago, I made sure I wasn't busy at 7.45pm, and last week I went full hen-do as I

settled in, squealing happily when the contestants began to belt out their very best worst singing voice. It is a fantastic waste of time.

Unlike most quiz shows – though I'm not sure this quite counts as a quiz show – this isn't about showing off knowledge or skill. It is about looking the business and lying through your teeth. The singers get a backstory – a West End child star, a children's entertainer – and they simply have to look believable. If they get far enough, they have to talk, to see if their speaking voice matches their karaoke pipes. Ultimately, it's about whether they appear trustworthy or not.

Another of my favourite wastes of time, [*This Is My House*](#), takes that further: four people walk around a home that only one of them owns, telling wonderful stories about why they have this vase, chose this painting or why they married this man, who has to sit there, straight-faced, as three strangers discuss the minutiae of their wedding day and what it is they fancy most about him. Brilliant.

[*Would I Lie To You?*](#) has been doing this for years, of course, but bare-faced fibbing is now popular light-entertainment fodder: see also [*The Circle*](#) and the return of [*Catfish*](#), in its new, UK edition.

It's funny, isn't it, that in this day and age, and you can see where I'm going with this, we've turned the ability to bullshit into a spectacle, something that we don't quite know how to process. Are we amused? Are we confounded? Or are we just numbly dancing in our living rooms as someone stands next to Ronan Keating, butchering Life Is a Rollercoaster?

Emily Blunt: fear not, horror is back soon



Emily Blunt in *A Quiet Place*: ready to chill. Photograph: Allstar/PARAMOUNT PICTURES

The final [trailer](#) for *A Quiet Place Part II* came out last week, teasing the eventual release of one of the many big blockbusters that have been pushed back again and again by the closure of cinemas.

Alongside all that end-of-the-world-again tension, and Emily Blunt in a smock with a gun, it weaves in quotes about how the film is made to be seen in cinemas.

Horror films really benefit from public viewing, because it means you can't wimp out and turn it off to watch the [wedding episode](#) of *Schitt's Creek*, and because there is a deep pleasure in being terrified in a room full of strangers who have all signed up to be scared. The collective jump makes it twice as thrilling.

I only saw the first [A Quiet Place](#) last year, during a masochistic period of consuming apocalypse-themed fiction. It was oddly soothing to gobble up stories of disasters.

In March 2020, sales of Emily St John Mandel's [Station Eleven](#), about the aftermath of an apocalyptic flu outbreak, rocketed, so clearly many felt the

same. Now that some parts of the world are beginning to inch towards the light, I wonder if doom stories will hold the same appeal?

Edward Short: an endless saga worthy of a mini-series



Edward Short and his unfinished home. Photograph: SWNS

There has been an update from [Edward Short](#), the man who appeared in the “saddest ever” episode of *Grand Designs*, which documented Short’s dreams of building an art deco lighthouse on a rugged patch of coast in Devon.

The whole affair [began in 2008](#) (and you can tell it’s from the olden days, because in the early stages of the project he said that he made his fortune in the music industry). It was supposed to take 18 months to build the lighthouse. The project is now into its third decade and has yet to be completed.

Short’s saga must be one of the most gripping and long-running on British television. The build ran into the kind of problems that often plague *Grand Designs* projects, but usually these homes are hit with one or two big issues rather than the full set of disaster cards.

Here, however, we saw rock that did not wish to be built on, terrible weather, safety concerns, spiralling costs, break-ups, meltdowns and the sudden need to build a driveway that looked like part of the M6.

“It was my overconfidence and arrogance that got me here in the first place so I’m doing what I need to do,” said Short last week.

He now believes that the project may be finished before 2022, at which point he will have to sell it, to pay back the enormous amount he borrowed to build it. Surely the inevitable end point is that within the next two years, this will be turned into an ITV drama, with Michael Sheen going full method to play Short.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/08/paddy-mcguinness-watching-people-telling-lies-is-oddly-irresistible>

[Observer letters](#)Ageing

Letters: a valiant campaign on care homes, but the pain goes on

Nicci Gerrard's laudable drive to highlight the plight of care home residents does not lessen the grief of loss



Nicci Gerrard: 'Dogged determination.' Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Nicci Gerrard: 'Dogged determination.' Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Sun 9 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Nicci Gerrard, through her writings in this newspaper and lead role in John's Campaign, has done more than just effect yet another government U-turn ("[Why did the government take so long to back down on this care home cruelty?](#)", Comment). She highlighted the patchwork of care homes covering more than 450,000 residents and their loved ones and how they had become "[jails of enforced loneliness](#)", where Covid was not the only killer. That

jolted me into connecting with other patient carers to channel and help assuage the pain of suffering in isolation, hitherto without mutual support and always in dread of that final telephone call.

I have great admiration for Nicci and her dogged determination to prove that “our campaign is not over” but her conclusion that “bereft families can finally open the door to step out together into the world” is tragically not the case for bereaved families like mine, who will have to live the pain of “unredeemable time” after receiving that call when I lost my darling wife in a prison of enforced loneliness.

Ron Noon

Allerton, Liverpool

A once proud name

I grew up the proud bearer of a singular, immediately recognised surname, origins obscure, within a family known for its professional service and solid reputation for quiet decency and hard work. There are no more male heirs left on our side, nor, I believe, within the older branch of the family. How sad, then, to see the legacy being left by the last male of the family as portrayed by the richly accurate pen of Chris Riddell (“[The emperor’s new curtains](#)”, Comment). My forebears would be turning in their graves.

Wendy Jenrick

Sheffield

Shameful inaction on fraud

In the face of more than 3m incidents of financial fraud a year worth at least £2.8bn, the government’s response to Martin Lewis that it is “really difficult” to regulate the likes of Facebook and Google is reprehensible (“[There’s an epidemic of scams, but fraudsters are getting off scot-free, says Martin Lewis](#)”, News). Furthermore, its preference to instead rely on Lewis’s £3m court victory, a minuscule blip on the revenues of the internet behemoths, did nothing to recompense victims. How much longer are we expected to accept government inaction and disregard for the rights of its citizens?

Neil Macehiter
Great Shelford, Cambridge

Cakes and Port Vale

Rachel Cooke's dilemma of how to warm oatcakes is easily solved ("[Let them eat oatcakes](#)", Notebook, Comment). Simply lay the oatcake on the grill pan, add thinly sliced or grated cheese (traditionally cheshire but cheddar will do) and grill until bubbling. Roll up and eat! Add extra fillings – brown sauce, bacon, sausage, mushroom if you must.

Oatcakes are our traditional foodstuff – product of local agriculture and the traditional bottle kilns that fired the potbanks of Stoke-on-Trent. For those who don't have a Neal's Yard Dairy on their doorstep, you can always use mail order, visit Stoke on Trent's oatcake shops, or make your own from ready-made packs available from Port Vale football club's shop. That way, you would be savouring a local delicacy as well as backing a football club whose owners, supporters and foundation value loyalty above all else.

Joan Walley
Stoke-on-Trent

Transgender fears

I wanted to say how much I valued the interview with Dr David Bell ("[What matters is the truth. I hate the fact that the fear of being seen to be transphobic now overrides everything](#)", the New Review). It is worrying that the Tavistock sought to suppress the (in my view) very reasonably questioning position of Dr Bell with respect to the potentially irreversible treatments being carried out on children and adolescents. The subsequent judgment of the high court in the case of Keira Bell v the Tavistock and now the recent decision of Sweden to halt the use of puberty blockers in children (except as part of research trials) bears this out.

More and more clinicians are becoming extremely concerned at the practice of increasingly treating psychological distress about one's body and gender with potentially irreversible medical and surgical treatments.

Dr Ellen Wright
London SE10

Not more solar energy

Will Hutton writes about the potential impact of space-based technologies on our lives, including plans to beam solar energy from giant mirrors in space to the Earth's surface ("[Fifty years after Apollo, space is about to transform our life on Earth beyond recognition](#)", Comment). Climate change is happening because rising CO2 levels trap heat in the atmosphere instead of allowing it to radiate into space. Pouring yet more energy into the system will only result in yet more heating. We already receive plenty of solar energy from space; we just need to make better use of it.

Chris Webster
Gümligen, Switzerland

Unfair payment after death

Anna Tims's report resonated with me following the sad death of my mother in November last year ("[Grieving relatives tell of despair at months of waiting for probate](#)", Cash). As executor, I appointed a solicitor to manage probate of my mother's estate. There is substantial inheritance tax (IHT), which I do not object to but cannot afford to pay so will need to liquidate assets from the estate once I have been granted probate. HMRC has agreed to wait for the IHT to be paid up to 28 days after the issue of the grant of probate. There appears to have been no progress made by the relevant probate registry since January. HMRC has confirmed that interest on the IHT will still accrue from 31 May, six months from the date of death.

A "financial fine" for an inadequate government system seems ludicrous, stressful and an unfair burden on grieving beneficiaries. My mother would be horrified if she knew that her family were struggling to benefit from her carefully managed estate.

John Tungatt
Bromley, London

Ted Hastings is right

Kenan Malik writes of crony capitalism and the unregulated market being central to the Grenfell tragedy (“[Grenfell is still giving up its secrets and they retain the power to shock](#)”, Comment). Nick Cohen writes on rampant cronyism/sleaze in central government and the lack of regulation in public life (“[If public life goes unregulated, just who will hold politicians to account?](#)”, Comment). Despite all this, Boris Johnson still heads the polls.

The final words of superintendent Ted Hastings, Britain’s favourite cop, come to mind: “What’s happened to us? When did we stop caring about honesty and integrity?”

Chandra Emmanuel

London SW6

Hair of the dog

Further to Barbara Ellen’s piece (“[Haven’t you heard, Tony? The nation’s barbers have reopened](#)”, Comment), I’m surprised that she made no tonsorial comparisons between Tony Blair and the ragamuffin stylings of the current occupant of No 10. Better perhaps to resemble a silver fox than a sheepdog?

David Hughes

Bath

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2021/may/09/observer-letters-valiant-campaign-on-care-homes-but-pain-goes-on>

[For the record](#)[UK news](#)

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 9 May 2021 01.00 EDT

A comment piece about the Grenfell Tower inquiry referred to the Building Research Establishment as the British Research Establishment, and to Kingspan as “the company that provided much of the Grenfell insulation”. Kingspan says its K15 product constituted around 5% of the insulation used in the building’s flammable cladding system ([Grenfell is still giving up its secrets and they retain the power to shock](#), 2 May, page 51).

The Coen brothers’ film *Inside Llewyn Davis* was misnamed *Inside Llewellyn Davis* when mentioned in a profile of Anna Maxwell Martin ([Now the sinister cop we love to hate, next a harried mum who makes us laugh](#), 2 May, page 38).

Other recently amended articles include:

[A drop of hope: new poetry exhibition celebrates power of Covid vaccine](#)

[Tory poll lead slashed as key elections loom across Britain](#)

[Letters to Camondo by Edmund de Waal review – Proustian evocation of the belle époque](#)

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

[OpinionRussia](#)

Are our courts a playground for bullies? Just ask Catherine Belton

[Nick Cohen](#)



Her acclaimed book is under attack from Russian billionaires. Are they out to silence her?



Billionaires have brought their cases to ‘dear old London town, with its quaint judges in 18th-century wigs and gowns’. Photograph: Sang Tan/AP

Billionaires have brought their cases to ‘dear old London town, with its quaint judges in 18th-century wigs and gowns’. Photograph: Sang Tan/AP

Sat 8 May 2021 13.00 EDT

Welcome to London, the censorship capital of the democratic world, where you must watch your step and bite your tongue if you know what’s good for you.

Everyone here who writes or broadcasts about plutocratic power should be honest with you before getting down to business. We’re pretty much free to say what we want about Boris Johnson, for example, or Dominic Raab. They’re only our prime minister and foreign secretary, after all: nobodies when put alongside the big boys. However badly we think they govern, they won’t hurt us.

When we turn to the super-rich, well, that seems like a different story. And more often than not, a story we are strongly encouraged not to run. It’s not just F Scott Fitzgerald’s old line that “the rich are different from you and me”. The costs and risks of our wretched legal system mean the rich can use it more easily than you and me. Before you read what follows, you should

know that here at the *Observer* we have been wondering what we can safely say about the cases of assorted Russian billionaires v Catherine Belton. Something? Anything? Nothing at all? Even in England, I think we are OK to tell you that the critics acclaimed her book, [*Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West*](#). The *Guardian* called it “[groundbreaking](#)”. The *New York Times* praised Belton’s “[elegant](#)” account.

Belton opens with a picture of a capital city that has grown used to Russian money paying “the rent and wages of London’s well-heeled PR and legal firms”. She says her book is presented as much about the west as [Russia](#).

The former Moscow correspondent for the *Financial Times* now faces a pile-on from Russian billionaires on a scale this country has never witnessed. Rosneft, the Kremlin-dominated oil producer (market capitalisation circa [\\$75bn](#)) whose chief executive, president and chairman, [Igor Sechin](#), began his rise to power as Vladimir Putin’s secretary in the 1990s, has lodged an action for libel. No further details were available at the court at the time of going to press.

Roman Abramovich, the Chelsea football boss (estimated net worth [\\$15.3bn](#)) is suing because of what he says are “[false and defamatory](#)” statements about his purchase of Chelsea FC. Mikhail Fridman, owner of Russia’s largest non-state bank (net worth about [\\$15.6bn](#)) is suing for libel. Fridman’s business partner, Pyotr Aven, (net worth a paltry [\\$5.3bn](#)) is suing for breach of data protection. Aven and Fridman [told the Financial Times](#) they “had no contact with, and did not co-ordinate a legal strategy with, the other plaintiffs or their lawyers”. Finally, there is a legal action by Shalva Chigirinsky, a former property tycoon (net worth unknown) with no details on record.

They have brought their cases to dear old London town, with its quaint judges in 18th-century wigs and gowns and gothic courtrooms, and with laws that can look as if they are made to match, for all their claims to modernity. As Belton appeared to foresee, London’s lawyers are hard at work. Carter-Ruck, CMS, Harbottle & Lewis and Taylor Wessing have a billionaire apiece in a kind of socialism of the litigious.

Belton's publishers, HarperCollins, say they will "robustly defend" her. *Putin's People* remains available to buy and read uncensored – for now, at any rate.

Rosneft and Abramovich are not only suing HarperCollins, they are suing Belton personally. If they are successful, they could strip her of what few assets she owns. You can see why journalists walk around on tiptoes.

Last week, Raab [promised to fight](#) "with the staunchest resolve" Russia's "malign activities aimed at undermining other countries' democratic systems". If the foreign secretary is serious, perhaps he should take a look at London's high-class service sector for the super-rich. He is unlikely to be able to rely on the legal profession to ask the hard moral and political questions for him.

I learned that in 2013 when I sat through a libel case arising from the death of Sergei Magnitsky in a foul Moscow prison. He worked for the Hermitage Capital fund and died suffering from horrible illnesses after he showed how former Russian officials and gangsters (a distinction without a difference if ever there was one) stole about \$230m from the Russian taxpayer. His friend and boss at Hermitage, Bill Browder, began a successful global campaign to freeze the western holdings of corrupt Russians.

One official, Pavel Karpov, sued Browder for libel in London. [Browder won](#), but Karpov stayed in Moscow and refused to pay Browder's costs of £600,000. In other words, Russia, an actively hostile foreign power, appeared able to use the English legal system to impose the punishment of a huge fine on one of its most effective critics.

Whatever the merits of the different cases against Belton, a free society must be free to examine the phenomenally wealthy without fearing the chilling effect of legal action. It should be alert to the possibility that at least some of what is unfolding in the courts could be Russian state action. Given the involvement of the Kremlin-dominated Rosneft, perhaps the thought is not too fanciful.

Leaving that aside, the EU is [under pressure](#) to act against what Americans call strategic lawsuits against public participation. Slapp actions grant access

to the courts to powerful individuals or organisations that are less interested in actual verdicts than the prospect of extraordinarily expensive legal costs browbeating critics. My friends at Index on Censorship tell me that Britain has shown no interest in following suit.

On the one hand, the UK government promotes a [global Media Freedom Coalition](#). On the other, the UK is denounced by the Foreign Policy Centre as “[the most frequent country of origin](#)” for foreign legal threats against investigative journalists.

If the case of Catherine Belton does not interest Dominic Raab, perhaps he should reflect on what will happen when the Chinese Communist party realises what London has to offer.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/08/are-our-courts-a-playground-for-bullies-just-ask-catherine-belton>

Headlines

- [Education Headteachers in England call for refund of £220m summer exam fees](#)
- [Rail transport High-speed trains cancelled after cracks found in carriages](#)
- [Tell us Have you been affected by train cancellations?](#)
- [Coronavirus 12 destinations on 'green list' for trips from 17 May](#)
- [Champions League Talks over final venue as Turkey on red list](#)

Exams

Headteachers in England call for refund of £220m summer exam fees

Campaigners want examination boards to give back half of fees after decision to scrap A-levels and GCSEs



Pupils sitting an exam before the pandemic. Exam boards say they have incurred substantial costs this year despite not having to print and mark millions of papers. Photograph: David Jones/PA

Pupils sitting an exam before the pandemic. Exam boards say they have incurred substantial costs this year despite not having to print and mark millions of papers. Photograph: David Jones/PA

[Richard Adams](#) *Education editor*

Sat 8 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Headteachers in England are calling for examination boards to refund half of the fees charged for A-level and GCSE entries this summer, arguing that

schools are doing the bulk of the work to decide this year's grades following the decision to scrap exams.

The Worthless? campaign group of headteachers said it wanted the examination boards to give back 50% or more of the fees for the summer exam series, estimated to total more than £220m, with the money needed to plug holes in school budgets caused by Covid-19.

“Schools should gain at least a 50% rebate on their normal exam costs. This funding rebate would then allow the additional exam work to be adequately paid for,” said the group, which is supported by hundreds of secondary school leaders in England.

[Few schools and colleges will rely solely on exam results to set grades](#)
[Read more](#)

“Crucially any extra money left over should be diverted towards supporting the many students who have suffered so badly as a result of the pandemic.”

“Schools have to be pragmatic and ensure that exam boards cover their costs in a reasonable and fair way. Equally, teachers, school leaders and examination support staff have picked up an abundance of extra work as we prepare to deliver teacher-assessed grading for years 11 and 13, and manage both results and appeals.”

Last year, the three major examination boards that administer the exams – AQA, OCR and Pearson – refunded about a quarter of exam fees, and many heads are expecting more this year because the government cancelled formal exams earlier.

Each A-level and BTec entry costs about £60, while GCSE entries cost £30 to £40 each. A pupil entered for nine or 10 [GCSEs](#) can cost a school well over £300. A school with a sixth form is likely to spend more than £100,000 a year on exam entries.

But representatives of the exam boards say they have incurred substantial costs this year despite not having to print and mark millions of papers.

The assessment guidance announced by the exam regulator, [Ofqual](#), and the Department for Education included the use of test questions produced by the exam boards, while the boards are also responsible for quality assurance of the final grades submitted by schools.

One exam board source said that while refunds were likely, a 50% rebate was “not realistic” because of the costs the boards were experiencing, including preparing a full suite of exams to be run in autumn for the small number of students who wish to take them.

A spokesperson for AQA, the largest exam board in England, said: “We’re hugely grateful for all the extra work that teachers are doing. It’s important to remember that entry fees aren’t just for exam papers and marking, though – we’re still incurring substantial costs in delivering qualifications this summer.

“It’s still too early to know the full cost but, as with last year when we returned £42m to schools and colleges, we have no wish to profit. We know schools are under financial pressure, so this year we gave them the option to pay 50% of our published fees when they made their entries and any extra when we know our full costs.”

Pearson said: “We have no wish to benefit financially from the cancellation of exams. As with last year, we will pass any savings from the cancellation of summer exams back to schools – although it’s too early right now to know the exact amount this will be.

“Exam fees don’t just cover exams. This year alone we issued nearly 14,000 questions for teachers to use to assess students, provided comprehensive support and training for grading and ongoing access to customer and support services. We will also be supporting quality assurance and running an appeals service.”

[Heads in England fear pushy parents will demand better exam grades](#)
[Read more](#)

But headteachers who spoke to the Guardian said they had received little support from the exam boards in assessing grades.

Alan Brookes, the executive head of Fulston Manor academy trust in Kent, said this year's assessments had caused a dramatic increase in workload and additional costs for schools, while the sample questions provided by the boards had been "shoddy".

"The heads I've been talking to would like to see a substantial refund because we can't see what [the exam boards] are spending their money on," Brookes said.

The campaign for larger refunds is supported by the Association of School and College Leaders and the National Association of Head Teachers. Geoff Barton, the general secretary of ASCL, said: "We would urge two things – one, that this happens as early as possible, and, two, that it reflects the fact that schools and colleges are shouldering the majority of the burden."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/may/08/headteachers-in-england-call-for-refund-of-220m-summer-exam-fees>

The ObserverRail transport

UK high-speed trains cancelled after cracks found in carriages

Passengers face ‘significant’ disruption as GWR and LNER suspend services in order to inspect trains

- [Have you been affected by the recent GWR and LNER train cancellations?](#)



An LNER train. LNER and GWR are advising passengers not to travel.
Photograph: Ken Jack/Getty

An LNER train. LNER and GWR are advising passengers not to travel.
Photograph: Ken Jack/Getty

[Gwyn Topham](#) and [Jedidajah Otte](#)

Sat 8 May 2021 09.23 EDT

Rail services on Britain's main intercity lines were halted and passengers told of potential prolonged disruption ahead, after cracks were found on high-speed trains.

All intercity trains on Great Western Railway and London North Eastern Railway were suspended on Saturday morning, as their entire fleets of Hitachi trains were taken out of service for safety.

Urgent inspections were being carried out across the operators' fleets after hairline cracks were discovered in several trains, with GWR trains suspected to be most affected.

Ministers ordered a rapid review after the latest problem discovered in the Hitachi trains led to them being withdrawn from the network overnight on Friday, leaving thousands of passengers unable to travel on lines linking London to Scotland and to the south-west.

Hull Trains and TransPennine Express, which also use similar Hitachi models, were disrupted, although their trains were being released back into service after inspection. About half of LNER trains had been passed fit by late Saturday afternoon.

Hitachi said the problem on its Class 800 trains, which were commissioned by the government for GWR and the East Coast LNER services in a controversial £5.7bn order, was still under investigation.

The cracks were found in the "lifting points" under the carriage – a new issue, after cracks were found in brackets linked to the suspension in GWR trains that were taken out of service in recent weeks.

The rail minister, Chris Heaton-Harris, said routine checks had identified cracks on part of the chassis of some Hitachi trains. He said: "Safety is always our absolute priority, so these trains have been taken off the network to undergo full and rigorous checks.

"Hitachi are working to complete these strict precautionary checks. Trains will be returned to service as quickly as possible once they are fully approved as safe by the manufacturer.

“Whilst some trains are starting to be reintroduced, disruption is likely for a prolonged period, particularly on GWR.

“We have also asked the industry to conduct a rapid and comprehensive review to resolve the issue.”

LNER and GWR advised passengers not to attempt to travel on Saturday, although some services recommenced in the afternoon. All high-speed GWR services between London, Bristol, Cardiff and Penzance were originally cancelled.

Among the affected passengers were Michelle Hammond, 38, an executive assistant from London, who had planned to travel with her husband and their 11-month-old baby from Tiverton Parkway in Devon to London on the 9.31 service. She said the live train trackers had not shown the cancellation: “It’s a disaster. We left home just after 8am and drove for an hour to the station, paid for our parking for the whole day, only to be met by a sign on the platform that told us the train was cancelled. It’s very frustrating, we’re massively out of pocket.”

Roger Ford, the industry and technology editor at Modern Railways, said significant disruption was to be expected for a while, and that the latest development must have been serious to prompt the sudden withdrawal from service.

The new fault is understood to be in a different part of the carriage from the problem discovered in April, when a crack of “substantial depth” was found during an inspection of one of GWR’s 93 Intercity trains.

Ford said GWR would likely be more severely affected than other operators as it took the first deliveries of Class 800 trains – built in Hitachi factories in Japan and Italy, and now mainly assembled in the Newton Aycliffe plant in north-east England. The 65 trains used by LNER, branded Azumas by the operator, are newer.

Ford said metal fatigue discovered in April that caused hairline cracks up to 15mm deep had seen some trains taken out of service for repair. “This is

now a separate issue, a different part of the shell – but metal fatigue gets worse, the cracks get deeper, with age.”

△ [#LNERUpdate](#) Our sincere apologies to all customers who are facing disruption today.

Our advise is to please defer your travel. Tickets will be valid up to and including Sunday 16th May 2021. pic.twitter.com/4boq30AIoM

— London North Eastern Railway (@LNER) [May 8, 2021](#)

Hitachi Rail apologised for the disruption. A spokesperson said: ““We understand the frustration caused and we would like to apologise for the inconvenience caused to passengers and operators.

“Having been cleared for service, some trains are now running again across the network. We are working as quickly and safely as possible to investigate the issue across the remainder of the fleets.”

Unions called for a full investigation. Mick Lynch, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and [Transport](#) union, said: “RMT is fully aware of the issues that have led to the cancellation of services on LNER today and that similar problems with cracks appearing in the fleet on Great Western are also emerging.

“Hitachi needs to ensure the highest safety standards and properly investigate and rectify the issues.”

TSSA general secretary Manuel Cortes said: “This rolling stock must not be allowed back into service until we are 100% certain these trains are safe.”

The Hitachi trains suffered an [embarrassing start in 2017](#), when the first GWR trains had to be taken out of service after a series of breakdowns, including on the inaugural service carrying the then transport secretary Chris Grayling from Bristol to London.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/08/uk-high-speed-trains-cancelled-after-cracks-found-in-carriages>

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[Travel](#)

Have you been affected by the recent GWR and LNER train cancellations?

We'd like to hear from those who have been affected by cancellations from Great Western Railway and London North Eastern Railway as they inspect trains for hairline cracks



A spokesman for GWR said the cracks were found in two of its Hitachi 800 trains during routine maintenance. Photograph: Ceri Breeze/Getty Images

A spokesman for GWR said the cracks were found in two of its Hitachi 800 trains during routine maintenance. Photograph: Ceri Breeze/Getty Images

[*Guardian community team*](#)

Sat 8 May 2021 05.29 EDT

Great Western Railway and London North Eastern Railway have [suspended rail services](#) over concerns about hairline cracks in carriages.

Passengers are being urged not to travel as urgent inspections are carried out in more than 1,000 trains. It comes after hairline cracks were found in several high-speed trains.

We'd like to hear from those who have been affected by the cancellations.

Share your experiences

You can get in touch by filling in the form below, anonymously if you wish or [via WhatsApp](#) by [clicking here](#) or adding the contact +44(0)7867825056. Your responses are secure as the form is encrypted and only the Guardian has access to your contributions.

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[Coronavirus](#)

England puts 12 destinations on Covid 'green list' for trips from 17 May

Destinations on green list include Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, Brunei and Israel

- [The new traffic-light system: all you need to know](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)
- ['Green list' guide: the countries travellers from England can visit](#)

01:30

Covid travel rules: 'green list' of destinations announced for England – video

[Aubrey Allegretti](#)
[@breeallegretti](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 13.49 EDT

Portugal and Israel are among a dozen countries which have been placed on England's first ever "green list", allowing people to go abroad from 17 May and return home without the need to quarantine.

Announcing the first easing of tight restrictions on foreign travel in months, the transport secretary, [Grant Shapps](#), said people would soon be able to book foreign holidays and make trips to see friends or relatives living overseas. He also announced plans to make digital vaccine passports available.

But restrictions are being tightened on three countries, Nepal, the Maldives and Turkey, where the [Champions League final is scheduled to be played](#) between Manchester City and Chelsea. Shapps said the government had offered to host the match in the UK.

[Countries put on England Covid ‘green list’ with trips allowed from 17 May](#)
[Read more](#)

Despite the resumption of international travel having been earmarked for 17 May in Boris Johnson’s roadmap, questions lingered about whether new Covid variants and case rises across the world could lead to the date being pushed back.

Shapps confirmed leisure trips abroad would be able to recommence in just over a week, and announced details of the new traffic-light system that will grade countries depending on their case and vaccine rates .

Travellers arriving from countries on the green list will not have to quarantine upon their return to the UK, while those on the amber list must self-isolate at home for 10 days, but can be released at day five if they get a negative Covid test result. The red list country rules remain that only UK residents and nationals are allowed in – and all must quarantine in a hotel for 10 days.

The 10 countries on the green list are: Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Brunei, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, Israel and Portugal – including the Azores and Madeira. Also on the green list are the territories of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.

While the green list will make travel easier from certain countries, getting into them may prove incredibly difficult. Several only allow their own nationals into the country. A government source said: “It’s so hard to get into some of these places, it’s hardly like we’re encouraging people to go to them.”

[map](#)

Shapps admitted people were likely to be disappointed that countries such as France, Italy and Spain were not on the green list. “As summer progresses, we hope more traditional tourist destinations will be unlocked, but we have to turn the key slowly,” he said.

Opening the borders too quickly risks a return to “the days of misery, suffering and loss” caused by Covid infection peaks, Shapps said. “For now we must tread carefully, respecting the science that will guide us along the way.

“Our success in combating Covid here ... is not yet replicated in many places abroad. We in this country have managed to construct a fortress against Covid but the disease is still prevalent in other parts of the world.”

Travellers were also told to expect longer queues at airports, and that if they wanted to travel to a green-list country, they should make sure they could get a refund if they needed to cancel given changes to the lists.

Shapps said the lists would be reviewed every three weeks, but has previously suggested major transit hubs such as the United Arab Emirates could remain on the red list indefinitely, given the number of passengers from across the world who are passing through its busy Dubai and Abu Dhabi airports.

He also said he was very open to Britain hosting the Champions League final at the end of May. “Given that there are two English clubs in that final, we look forward to hearing what they have to say,” he said.

Travellers will also be able to show a [Covid passport](#) proving they have been vaccinated to potentially avoid quarantine in the country they travel to from the UK.

Frantic work is under way to [update the NHS app](#) so people can use it as digital verification they have been vaccinated. Those unable to access the NHS app will be able to request a paper certificate from the NHS by ringing 119 – but not until 17 May.

Shapps’ announcement affects only people living in England. The administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have yet to update their rules. However they are expected to be “broadly similar in design”, the transport secretary has said.

Huw Merriman, the Tory chair of the Commons transport select committee welcomed the lifting of the travel ban, but said “barriers remain in place for most of our popular destinations” and that travellers heading to England from much of Europe would face increased costs for testing that would deter travel.

He called on the government to be transparent about the data that underpins decisions about changing the list, and to move quickly to digitise documents such as the passenger locator form. “This should allow for more countries to move from amber to green this summer and unleash the pent-up desire to travel felt by so many across the country. Many jobs and livelihoods will depend on it,” he said.

Nick Thomas-Symonds, the shadow home secretary, said the government had “failed to protect our borders from Covid with a lax and ineffective system that has allowed dangerous strains to reach the UK”. He added: “The system announced will continue that failure, as only a tiny percentage of people will be required to undertake hotel quarantine, despite the virus continuing to mutate and transmit across the world.”

Response from the travel industry was highly critical. Tim Alderslade, the chief executive of Airlines UK, described the announcement as a missed opportunity.

“With so few countries making it on to the green list, it represents a reopening of air travel in name only. By contrast, the EU has said vaccinated people will be able to travel without restrictions, which leaves the UK at risk of falling behind and not opening up international travel to key markets across Europe as well as the United States.

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“We strongly believe that, alongside the domestic economy, travel can be safely reopened and so we must see major additions to the green list at the next review point in three weeks, alongside a simpler and much-reduced testing burden so that travel does not become the preserve of the wealthy only.”

Gloria Guevera, the president of the World Travel & Tourism Council said: “While we understand that protecting public health should be the priority,

the UK is being too cautious and risks losing its hard-won competitive advantage achieved by the early vaccine rollout by being too slow to allow the significant resumption of international travel.

“Holidaymakers and business travellers will be disappointed by today’s news, with so few countries on the ‘green list’, while Europe steals a march on the UK by continuing to open up and welcome visitors back.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/07/trips-abroad-for-people-in-england-to-be-allowed-from-17-may>.

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Champions League

Champions League: FA in talks over relocating final as Turkey joins red list

- Manchester City and Chelsea fans affected by move
- FA in talks with Uefa over bringing final to England



Manchester City and Chelsea in action in last month's FA Cup semi-final. They are due to contest the Champions League final in Istanbul. Photograph: Ben Stansall/Reuters

Manchester City and Chelsea in action in last month's FA Cup semi-final. They are due to contest the Champions League final in Istanbul. Photograph: Ben Stansall/Reuters

[Paul MacInnes](#)

[@PaulMac](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 15.46 EDT

The Football Association is in talks with Uefa over relocating the [Champions League](#) final to England after Turkey was placed on the UK government's travel red list.

Uefa had been expected to confirm details on Friday for the final on 29 May, with [Manchester City](#) and Chelsea fans expected to be allocated at least 4,000 tickets each for the match in Istanbul.

That decision has been postponed pending negotiations, however, with English supporters told to stay at home by the UK government.

[Manchester City v Chelsea: bravura final battle is held up by healthy bottom line | Barney Ronay](#)
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The chances of the game staying in Turkey are remote unless the players are granted an exemption from having to quarantine for 10 days in a government-approved hotel on their return to the UK.

Euro 2020, in which most players of both teams would be expecting to compete in, begins on 11 June, with training camps and pre-tournament friendlies scheduled before that date.

“We are having to be cautious about this,” the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, said. “I’m afraid we’re having to put Turkey on the red list and it will have ramifications.

“Fans should not travel to Turkey. The FA are in discussions with [Uefa](#) already on this and we are very open to hosting the final. Ultimately it’s the decision of Uefa. We have a successful track record of matches with spectators. I’ve spoken to the sports minister, we’re very open to it and in the end it’s a decision for Uefa but given it’s two English clubs in the final we’re waiting to hear what they have to say.”

Uefa has insisted throughout the week that the final would stay at Istanbul's Ataturk Stadium despite the current coronavirus situation in the country.

Turkey is in full lockdown until 17 May at the earliest, but while infection rates are still high, with more than 20,000 new cases being recorded each day, they have halved in the past two weeks. The country is also in the top 10 of global vaccination rates, a factor the UK government considers when determining travel status.

It is unclear as to which venue the match could be played at in England, with Wembley currently scheduled to host the play-offs that weekend – though the EFL may be open to moving them – and many club grounds expected to rip up their pitches at the end of the domestic season. Hampden Park remains a possibility. It could be that the match is played elsewhere with Portugal named on the government's green list for travel, meaning that fans and players could travel to the country without quarantining on return. Lisbon hosted the final three rounds of the competition last summer, after the [Champions League](#) resumed following the first wave of the pandemic. Istanbul had originally been scheduled to host the final then too.

It is understood neither Chelsea nor [Manchester City](#) are lobbying Uefa for a change of venue, with both clubs having only on Friday signed a letter of reconciliation with the governing body over their brief involvement in the European Super League.

A Uefa spokesperson said: "Uefa has just learned that Turkey has been put on the red list and we need a bit of time to reflect on the topic."

When approached for comment, the FA said that the final choice of venue was a matter for Uefa.

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2021.05.08 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus live news: Pope calls for vaccine patent waiver; UK 'could be protected from Covid by August'](#)
- [Trans-Tasman bubble New Zealand to lift New South Wales travel ban](#)
- [WHO First Chinese Covid vaccine approved for emergency use](#)
- [India Cases rip through threadbare rural healthcare system](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

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Merkel says vaccine patent waiver ‘not the solution’ – as it happened

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Coronavirus

Trans-Tasman bubble: New Zealand to lift NSW travel ban on Sunday night

The New Zealand government is satisfied the Covid risk has dissipated as NSW again records no new locally transmitted cases



File photo of a Qantas flight taking off in Auckland bound for Sydney. New Zealand says the travel bubble will be reinstated with NSW on Sunday night. Photograph: James D Morgan/Getty Images

File photo of a Qantas flight taking off in Auckland bound for Sydney. New Zealand says the travel bubble will be reinstated with NSW on Sunday night. Photograph: James D Morgan/Getty Images

Australian Associated Press
Sat 8 May 2021 03.08 EDT

New Zealand has extended its suspension of quarantine-free travel until midnight on Sunday, when it will restore regular travel links with [New](#)

[South Wales.](#)

The country [enacted the travel pause on Thursday](#) in response to two new community cases of Covid-19 in Sydney.

NSW health officials still have not identified [the missing link between the positive tests and quarantine](#), however New Zealand's Covid-19 minister, Chris Hipkins, is satisfied the risk to Kiwis has dissipated.

“There has been close liaison between the health agencies,” he said.

[‘Disowned’: family says pleas for help ignored as Australian man dies of Covid-19 in India](#)

[Read more](#)

Hipkins said the NSW risk assessment was that “the two community cases in [Sydney](#) are contained and that there is no evidence of widespread undetected community transmission”.

New Zealand's travel ban to the entire state was in stark contrast to other Australian states, which largely chose only to ban travellers who had visited exposure sites.

The country's health authorities have not explained their overzealous approach, which saw NSW citizens hundreds of kilometres away from Sydney banned from travel.

New Zealand's Covid-19 website was also slow to reflect this decision, meaning northern NSW citizens who attempted to fly to NZ from the Gold Coast and Brisbane were upset when they were turned away.

Contact tracers contacted 5,477 people who arrived in NZ from NSW in the past week, urging them to monitor their symptoms.

One person, identified by NZ [Health](#), was asked to quarantine after visiting an exposure site. That person had since returned a negative test from their stay in managed isolation.

NSW again diagnosed no new locally transmitted cases from more than 22,000 tests in the 24 hours to 8pm on Friday but authorities issued an alert for customers who visited Double Bay Woolworths.

Anyone who attended the store between 10.45am and 11.00am on Monday, 3 May must get tested immediately and isolate until a negative result is received.

[NSW Covid restrictions Sydney: what you can and can't do under coronavirus rules on Mother's Day weekend](#)
[Read more](#)

Sydneysiders were being urged to wear masks and [adhere to other restrictions without cancelling their Mother's Day plans](#).

The restrictions – which extend to the Blue Mountains, the Central Coast and the Illawarra – would remain in place until at least the end of the weekend. They include compulsory masks on public transport and a 20-person cap on indoor gatherings.

But the premier, Gladys Berejiklian, did not want the curbs to suppress Sydneysiders' spirits, encouraging residents to keep their Mother's Day bookings for Sunday and continue supporting local businesses.

Liquor and Gaming NSW was urging businesses to do the right thing over the weekend too. Compliance officers would be out in force across the state, checking venues were Covid-safe.

Businesses can be fined up to \$5,000 and forced to shut their doors for defying Covid rules, including the requirement all patrons check in.

“Now is not the time to get complacent, the Covid safety requirements are in place for a reason, and all venues need to make sure they are fully compliant,” the director of compliance, Dimitri Argeres, said.

Officers would also be checking those participating in the NSW government's Dine & Discover voucher program were complying with its rules.

“This includes not artificially inflating prices or allowing customers to use the vouchers to buy restricted products,” Argeres said.

[Australian Olympic team to receive fast-track Covid vaccinations ahead of Tokyo Games](#)

[Read more](#)

Meanwhile the Australian Olympic Committee said the [vaccination of Australian athletes for the Tokyo Games](#) would commence on Monday.

“(We have had) countermeasures predicated on there being no vaccine, so that situation has improved – the Games are going ahead,” the AOC chair, John Coates, said on Saturday.

“All of the precautions we are taking are aimed at the health of the athletes and the health of the people of Japan.”

Coates also said a decision on whether local spectators would be permitted to attend the Games is expected to be announced at the end of May.

The AOC said vaccination for Australian athletes would commence on Monday, while also confirming the AOC would pay for the athletes’ quarantine.

The AOC is running the rollout for the Australian Olympic team and the Paralympic team, which will commence on Monday in the five mainland capital cities and at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra.

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Vaccines and immunisation

WHO approves first Chinese Covid vaccine for emergency use

Sinopharm jab will also be added to Covax programme for the developing world in the coming weeks



The WHO is recommending the vaccine for adults 18 years and older, in a two-dose schedule with a spacing of three to four weeks. Photograph: Robert Atanasovski/AFP/Getty Images

The WHO is recommending the vaccine for adults 18 years and older, in a two-dose schedule with a spacing of three to four weeks. Photograph: Robert Atanasovski/AFP/Getty Images

[Vincent Ni](#) *China affairs correspondent*

Fri 7 May 2021 14.26 EDT

The World Health Organization has given emergency use approval to one of the Chinese-made [Sinopharm's Covid-19 vaccines](#) in a major boost to the

product's credibility.

The long-awaited decision made on Friday by a WHO technical advisory group would also see the Chinese vaccine being included in the Covax programme for the developing world in the coming weeks, and distributed through UN agencies, potentially benefiting millions of people in need worldwide.

“This afternoon, WHO gave emergency use listing to Sinopharm Beijing’s Covid-19 vaccine,” the WHO director-general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said.

“This expands the list of Covid-19 vaccines that Covax can buy, and gives countries confidence to expedite their own regulatory approval, and to import and administer a vaccine.” The Covax programme aims to provide equitable access to doses around the world and particularly in lower-income countries.

The WHO later said in [a statement](#): “On the basis of all available evidence, WHO recommends the vaccine for adults 18 years and older, in a two-dose schedule with a spacing of three to four weeks. Vaccine efficacy for symptomatic and hospitalised disease was estimated to be 79%, all age groups combined.”

The WHO admitted that few older adults (over 60 years) were enrolled in clinical trials, so efficacy could not be estimated in this age group. Yet, the organisation does not recommend an upper age limit for the vaccine “because preliminary data and supportive immunogenicity data suggest the vaccine is likely to have a protective effect in older persons”, it said.

The WHO has already granted emergency use listing to the vaccines being made by Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, and the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab being produced at sites in India and South Korea.

State-owned Chinese firm, Sinopharm, has so far produced two vaccines – one developed in Beijing, the other made in Wuhan, the city where Covid-19 was first reported last year.

Today's approval is for the vaccine from Beijing. A decision on a separate Chinese vaccine, Sinovac, is expected next week, WHO said.

Critics of the Chinese-made vaccine had for months questioned what they regarded as a lack of public trial data.

Sinopharm said in March that at least 100m of doses of its two vaccines have been supplied across the world, while over 80m doses of the two vaccines were administered.

Experts said today's decision by the world's top public health authority could be a gamechanger, especially for developing countries.

"If there is a green light, these vaccines could boost the thin stream of supplies that has been channelled through Covax to date," Suerie Moon, co-director of the Global Health Programme at Geneva's Graduate Institute, told the Associated Press news agency.

Covax – which has pledged to procure two billion doses of jabs by the end of the year – has so far distributed over 54m doses. It is facing limited supplies from western countries and India, where Covid cases continue to rise.

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Coronavirus

Covid rips through rural India's threadbare healthcare system

The pandemic overwhelming the big cities is reaching areas of Bihar where there is one doctor for 40,000 people



Health workers wearing protective gear ride a tractor as they sanitise a street with disinfectant amid the coronavirus pandemic in India. Photograph: Mohd Arhaan Archer/AFP/Getty Images

Health workers wearing protective gear ride a tractor as they sanitise a street with disinfectant amid the coronavirus pandemic in India. Photograph: Mohd Arhaan Archer/AFP/Getty Images

[*Manoj Chaurasia*](#) in Bihar and [*Hannah Ellis-Petersen*](#) in Delhi

Fri 7 May 2021 12.57 EDT

In the small rural village of Kathail, in the east of India's poorest state, Bihar, access to healthcare has always been scarce. But when 34-year-old

Umakant Singh fell sick with a cough and fever last week, his brother Mantu Singh did all he could to find help.

For four days Mantu rushed around, collecting the limited medicines he could find for his younger brother and nursing him at home. But he knew what these symptoms meant: Covid-19 had reached their village.

On the fifth day Umakant's condition worsened. The nearest hospital, Jawaharlal Nehru medical college and hospital, was more than 30 miles away.

"But when I reached the hospital, there were no doctors present," said Mantu. "I was told the doctors were coming soon and was asked to buy some medicines from the market so that they could be administered to the patient."

After returning to the hospital with the medicine, Mantu found that his brother had fallen unconscious, but still no doctors had arrived. "He collapsed in the absence of any treatment and died the same day," said Mantu. "Had he been provided timely medical care, he would have been alive today." Umakant's body later tested positive for Covid-19.



Medical staff treat a patient inside the emergency ward of Jawahar Lal Nehru medical college and hospital during the coronavirus outbreak, in

Bhagalpur, Bihar. Photograph: Danish Siddiqui/Reuters

It is a story being repeated across rural India, which is home to around 65% of a population of 1.3 billion people. The Covid-19 second wave which has devastated India in recent weeks has brought the healthcare systems in big cities such as Delhi to the brink of collapse, with a deadly shortage of oxygen, hospital beds, intensive care facilities and doctors. On Friday, the country reported another record rise of 414,188 new infections, taking India's total to 21.5m cases.

Now it is spreading out into India's hinterland. Here, healthcare spending, the number of hospitals and per capita ratio of doctors are far below those of Mumbai and Delhi, and there is currently a 76% shortfall of specialist doctors – 80% of doctors in India are in urban areas.

In rural Bihar, where one doctor services 43,788 people (the WHO guidelines advise one doctor per 1,000 people), most said they had little hope of proper treatment if they fell ill with Covid-19, with hospitals sometimes hundreds of miles away. The mechanisms for disease surveillance and death reporting in deprived rural communities are also very poor, meaning the true toll of the pandemic may never be known.

The absence of technical trained staff has been a major issue for Bihar during the pandemic. While 207 ventilators have been given to the state, they have been gathering dust because no-one is trained to operate them. Images have also emerged this week of Covid-19 patients being treated on the floor of Bihar government hospitals because they are so overburdened.

In Umakant's village, which has a population of 1,000, 20 villagers have recently tested positive. Resident Akshay Singh said nearby hospitals did not have the doctors, the oxygen or the medicines to treat Covid-19 patients. "You can imagine the lack of availability of beds and oxygen cylinders in the hospitals," he said.

Even as districts are accused of concealing the true death toll, Covid fatalities are rising at record rate in Bihar. In the year from March 2020 when the pandemic first hit, to March this year, 1,578 lives were lost to the

virus in Bihar, officially. But in just the past 36 days, there have already been 1,499 recorded coronavirus deaths in the state, many from rural areas.

The local civil surgeon, a senior medic in the area, Dr Sudhir Mahato said the virus was now decimating rural villages and they were struggling to have the capacity to test everyone. As hundreds queued every day at a local healthcare centre for tests, many feared the centres themselves had now become super-spreader venues.

In Salempur village, in northern Bihar's Gopalganj district, the spread of the virus has been brutal, claiming 10 lives in the space of a fortnight.

"The overall situation looks very critical," said Dhananjay Singh, the chief of Salempur village council. His younger brother Sanjay Singh, 48, was among the dead.

"My brother came down with a fever and throat infection so we got him admitted to a local government hospital in Gopalganj town and he was found positive for Covid-19. But they lacked even the most basic facilities, so his condition deteriorated quickly," said Singh. "Eventually, we rushed him to a private hospital in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh but it was too late, he died."

The state is currently under lockdown and the Bihar health minister Mangal Pandey insisted more doctors and healthcare staff were being recruited temporarily to meet the growing need.

But Suresh Baitha, a ward official from Gopalganj district, said that an issue they were encountering was that hospital staff were treating Covid patients as "social outcasts" and did not want to touch them, particularly as they were not being given adequate protective equipment. General medicines and vitamins recommended for Covid treatment had also all run out, he added.

"The major problem is that the hospital staff don't want to touch the Covid patients fearing they themselves could get infected. The result is that the majority of the patients don't want to go to hospital and by the time they are admitted there, their condition becomes critical," said Baitha.

He was echoed by the local civil surgeon Dr Yogendra Bhagat. “The problem is that no-one want to work at this critical time,” he said. “We are even facing problems in disposal of the Covid bodies.”

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2021.05.08 - Opinion

- The Conservatives' win in Hartlepool is a triumph of political rebranding
- The Jersey fishing standoff shows Brexit has only just begun
- Labour will probably ask a focus group why it's losing – and that's the problem
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- The politics sketch So who are you again? Boris Johnson meets the new MP for Hartlepool

[Opinion](#)Conservatives

The Conservatives' win in Hartlepool is a triumph of political rebranding

[Carl Shoben](#)

The Tories are selling themselves as a party of change and investment, and voters are buying it



Boris Johnson and newly elected MP for Hartlepool Jill Mortimer.
Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

Boris Johnson and newly elected MP for Hartlepool Jill Mortimer.
Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

Sat 8 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Amid all the inevitable soul-searching for Labour following Thursday's defeat in the [Hartlepool byelection](#), it is just as instructive to examine what went right for the Conservatives. They have done a far better analysis of the electorate, changing demographics, changing economies, and successfully

moulded a coalition that is becoming embedded in the old parts of Labour country. A “red wall” is the wrong way to describe it, because walls tend to stay up.

It seems remarkable that a party that has been in power, nationally, for more than a decade continually presents itself as the “change” party. And yet it did so in this byelection, electing a Tory MP in Hartlepool for the first time in 62 years, following a similar strategy during the general election.

To many voters, this isn’t the austerity party of Cameron and Osborne. In areas such as the north-east, where investment is crucial to rebuild the regional economy, the Conservatives have rebranded themselves – genuinely in some respects – as an invest and rebuild party. Popular Tees Valley mayor Ben Houchen has led this renewal: he even nationalised the local airport – and introduced [free parking](#) in town centres. It’s clear that the Conservative decision to put him at the front of their Hartlepool campaign, not Jill Mortimer, their actual candidate, was one of the keys to success.

In one of Survation’s [earlier polls](#), we showed both Labour and Tory supporters in Hartlepool backed policies such as higher pay for nurses, investment over “balancing the budget” and renationalising Royal Mail. Broadly speaking, the Tories spent the entire campaign talking about bringing investment to the area. Labour’s candidate, Paul Williams, defined his top vision as teaching children to read, and bringing back services to a local hospital that he had himself recommended for downgrading when he was a local commissioner.

Brexit also cast a shadow throughout this byelection, and clearly remains a driver of Conservative success. One narrative is that it was impossible for Labour to win on Thursday because of the demise of the Brexit party, which in 2019 split the vote, taking 26%, and allowing Labour to keep the seat. Labour could have held on this week if it had limited the number of those voters switching to the [Conservatives](#) to about 50%. In the end, between 70% and 90% of them backed Mortimer.

In the 2017 general election, Labour’s balancing act on Brexit may have contributed to it receiving more than 50% of the vote in Hartlepool. What

happened after that has allowed the Conservatives to embed the Brexit issue as a core part of its electoral appeal to voters.

While Labour held on to the Hartlepool seat in 2019, its policy of backing a second referendum was clearly a disastrous error and a continuing gift to the Conservatives. Labour's choice for the byelection of someone who vocally supported a People's Vote suggests lessons from the debacle have not yet been learned.

The Conservatives, meanwhile, had other advantages during the campaign and played them well. The pandemic has played a significant part. It has set politics on hold for a year, and as much as Labour supporters get angry about this, most voters don't blame the Conservatives for Britain's high Covid death toll. Now, with the vaccine programme a visible success, it is clear that Boris Johnson's party is enjoying a "vaccine bounce".

Johnson's popularity among Hartlepool voters was clearly a significant factor in this victory. While the prime minister and Keir Starmer are almost neck and neck in national polls, in Hartlepool, Johnson had a decisive lead. His net rating (the difference between those who approve and disapprove) of +23 compared quite starkly to Starmer's -18. Approval on its own (as opposed to net score), though, tells its own story: Johnson's approval of 51% versus Starmer's 22%. Our telephone interviewers [throughout this campaign](#) reported a quick response from those planning to vote Conservative and a far slower one for Labour – that is also instructive. There is a sense of apathy towards Labour rather than outright hostility.

In the longer term strategic sense, the Conservatives have been stronger than Labour in meeting the challenge of changing demographics, particularly within our first past the post system. ["Pasokification"](#) – the decline of centre left, social democrat parties seen in many countries – has been a continuing problem for Labour. Its vote has been falling in many working-class former strongholds for 20 years, but it is the Tories who appear to really understand what is happening. The Conservatives have gained broad support that spreads widely enough across England, while Labour's growing voter strength is confined to fewer but larger majorities in cities and university towns. Yesterday [Dominic Cummings said](#) that the centre ground does not exist; you may not like the messenger, but this could prove to be true.

- Carl Shoben is Survation's strategic communication director and a former Labour strategy director

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The Jersey fishing standoff shows Brexit has only just begun

[Marley Morris](#)

Ultimately, Britain will need to find a way to cooperate with its closest neighbours without resorting to gunboat diplomacy



‘The withdrawal agreement and the UK-EU free trade deal set out a framework for a future relationship, but leave crucial matters ambiguous and unsettled.’ Photograph: Gary Grimshaw/Bailiwick Express/PA

‘The withdrawal agreement and the UK-EU free trade deal set out a framework for a future relationship, but leave crucial matters ambiguous and unsettled.’ Photograph: Gary Grimshaw/Bailiwick Express/PA

Fri 7 May 2021 08.03 EDT

When the UK and the EU [finalised](#) their trade deal last December, you could be forgiven for assuming that Boris Johnson had fulfilled his pledge to “get

Brexit done”. But as events this week have proved, the process is far from over. An [argument](#) with France over fishing rights around the island of Jersey rapidly descended into threats, blockades and the government sending in the navy.

The current dispute rests on differing interpretations of one part of the [trade and cooperation agreement](#) (TCA), the trade deal that now governs economic relations between the UK and the EU. While Jersey is not part of the UK and was never within the EU, the TCA replaced the Bay of Granville agreement, which used to govern fishing rights in Jersey’s waters.

The new agreement requires any EU vessel fishing in Jersey’s waters to have a new licence from the Jersey government. These licenses are issued according to how much a vessel carried out fishing activities in Jersey’s waters between February 2017 and January 2020. After a transitional arrangement was agreed in January while the new system was being set up, these new licences started to be [issued](#) by Jersey at the end of April.

The response to Jersey’s new licences has been furious. The French have argued that the new arrangements are unfair and that the licences come with strict conditions limiting how many days a vessel can operate in Jersey’s waters or what type of fish it can catch. On Thursday, French fishing boats congregated at Jersey’s St Helier port in [protest](#) at the licensing arrangements. The [situation](#) escalated further when the British government sent Royal Navy patrol vessels to the area to monitor the protests, amid threats from France that it could [cut off access](#) to Jersey’s electricity supply.

Ultimately, we should expect this situation to be resolved diplomatically before long. But the standoff points to a broader challenge for the UK as it navigates its post-Brexit relationship with its European neighbours. The withdrawal agreement and the UK-EU free trade deal set out a framework for the UK’s future relationship with the EU, but in many respects these treaties leave crucial matters ambiguous and unsettled. As the deal is implemented in practice, this seems bound to lead to continuing tensions with the EU and its member states.

Take these three examples of simmering controversies within the UK-EU relationship.

First, on fishing, the free trade agreement settles how to manage reciprocal access to waters and the sharing of fish stocks for an “adjustment period” of five and a half years. But after the end of this period, in 2026, negotiations between the two sides on future access are meant to resume on an annual basis and the UK is expected to push for larger quota shares. As a result, the deal kicks many of the big arguments over fishing rights into the long grass, raising the likelihood of further flare-ups down the line.

Second, the protocol intended to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland has raised a succession of major [challenges](#) for trade within the United Kingdom. Food and drink companies in particular have [struggled](#) to handle new paperwork and plant and animal health checks for goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

Given the broader [implications](#) for political stability in Northern Ireland, it's clear that correctly implementing the protocol will require just as much care and consideration as the original negotiations. Yet with the EU [launching](#) infringement proceedings over the UK's decision to unilaterally extend the “grace period” for exempting checks on supermarket agri-food goods to Northern Ireland, the prospects of a quick resolution seem slim.

Finally, on the critical [issue](#) of the “level playing field”, the UK and the EU have agreed a complex set of provisions that seem destined to be the subject of future dispute. The idea of the level playing field is to ensure that the UK and the EU do not gain an unfair competitive advantage as they diverge from each other's regulations. The UK-EU deal includes commitments on upholding standards on the environment, climate breakdown and workers' rights, as well as rules on subsidy control.

[The Brexit deal was astonishingly bad, and every day the evidence piles up | Polly Toynbee](#)

[Read more](#)

If (or when) the UK decides to no longer follow the EU's approach to these standards, the commission will be watching carefully to ensure there is no breach of the terms of the trade agreement. The more the UK plans to diverge from the EU's regulatory model, the more likely the prospect of a series of protracted legal battles over the impacts on trade and competition.

This week's events therefore highlight that in many respects the [Brexit](#) process has only just begun. After all, untangling decades worth of trade ties and regulatory harmonisation was never going to happen overnight.

To make this work, it's time to turn the page on the Brexit wars and resist inflaming tensions with the EU and its members with thinly veiled threats or acts of defiance. Ultimately, we will need to find a way to cooperate alongside our closest neighbours and largest trading partners – without resorting to gunboat diplomacy.

- Marley Morris is associate director for migration, trade and communities at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

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[OpinionLabour](#)

Labour will probably ask a focus group why it's losing – and that's the problem

[Aditya Chakraborty](#)



The Conservatives are radically reshaping the UK in their image. Keir Starmer urgently needs an alternative vision



‘Labour’s expertise at staging a family row in public is unequalled outside the Queen Vic. But it makes not a jot of difference to the big picture.’ Kier Starmer in London on 7 May. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

‘Labour’s expertise at staging a family row in public is unequalled outside the Queen Vic. But it makes not a jot of difference to the big picture.’ Kier Starmer in London on 7 May. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

Fri 7 May 2021 09.40 EDT

Last week, a senior member of Keir Starmer’s shadow cabinet told me: “If the Tories can win Hartlepool, nowhere is safe. They can win anywhere.” A seat that had been [Labour](#) since its creation, slap-bang in what the party once called its heartlands, its significance was painfully obvious to Starmer’s team. They had moulded their leader and their entire strategy around winning back the “red wall”, and here was their first crucial test. Even amid the largest ever set of polls outside a general election, senior officials at party HQ kicked off their operations meeting each morning with a discussion of this one constituency 260 miles up the M1. Time, money, staff: they threw whatever they could at it.

They still got bulldozed. Hartlepool has voted by a landslide for a Conservative who, [by her own admission](#), has spent more time in the Cayman Islands than in the town she will from next week represent at

Westminster. And the really bad news for Labour is: there's much more bad news to come.

In 2017, Tees Valley and West Midlands elected Tory mayors by the slimmest of margins. This time around, Ben Houchen and Andy Street won't have to count their majorities; they can weigh them. The catalogue of failings under Boris Johnson's government – its lethal complacency over Covid, botched return of schooling and exams and its transfiguration of Downing Street into a donor-sponsored artisanal Versailles – counts for nothing. Instead, the prime minister will spend the weekend being chauffeured between celebration parties. Meanwhile, Labour is about to descend into what one backbencher last night predicted as “an almighty punch-up”, complete with bitter reshuffles of both Starmer's own office and the shadow cabinet.

All this will doubtless make good copy, since Labour's expertise at staging a family row in public is unequalled outside the Queen Vic. But it makes not a jot of difference to the big picture, which is that the UK is undergoing one of the most sweeping electoral reconfigurations of our lifetimes. It runs [much deeper](#) and further back than Johnson's leadership of the Tories, but it gifts his party a clear run at redefining politics and economics in this country, which they show every intention of doing.

It is high time people in the Labour party, whether on its right or left, pulled their noses out of their navels and saw that. In the landslide defeat of December 2019, both sides sought false comfort in tinny excuses, in booing Jeremy Corbyn or hissing at treacherous frontbench remainers. This was not analysis but score-settling, yet it has shaped Starmer's first year. The new leader has spent every minute of airtime showing the public that he is not-Corbyn and not-Johnson, and not-remain and not-opposition-for-the-sake-of-it. He has taken barely a second to define what he is.

Starmer growls about “[Major Sleaze](#)” serving the money men – but never delivers the obvious punchline that only he is on the public's side. The impression is that all politicians are corrupt. His lieutenants complain about the Tories buying up seats with the sweeties of public investment and government jobs – but rarely say what they would offer, because they

haven't worked that bit out. The result is that voters look at the [pork barrel](#) and decide they quite fancy a bacon sarnie, too.

Starmer's parliamentary private secretary, Carolyn Harris, gloats at how upset her boss makes the Labour left and says, "we must be doing it right because this is what it's all about" – when actually (as people like Harris rightly used to tell Corbyn's lot), it's all about attracting voters. From this the public deduces that Labour is more bothered about its own faction-fighting than taking on Johnson, and they are correct.

The sum total of all this is that Starmer and his team look scared of their own voters. They don't know what to do about the activists who congregated around Corbyn, so try to expel some and hope the rest will fade away. They don't know what to offer so-called red wall voters, so proffer a union flag. It looks focus-grouped and fake because it is.

This weekend, the radio and TV will be full of Starmer's aides, advisers and would-be advisers intoning that he needs to "speed up the pace" of modernising the party. In layman's terms, what they mean is he should double down on a losing strategy and travel even further along this dead end. The Labour leader would be far better off looking at those rare victories his party will chalk up this weekend, such as Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester and Paul Dennett in Salford. Those are two high-profile local politicians happy to champion the people on their side of a dividing line and to give Johnson some serious stick. And they offer some good lessons to their colleagues in Westminster.

The political classes took that flyweight David Cameron far too seriously and haven't taken Johnson seriously enough, but the truth is that he is remoulding Conservatism and his own party in a way we have not seen since Margaret Thatcher. As a prime minister, Johnson is abysmal. As an electioneering party leader, he is unrivalled and uninhibited. Whatever Team Starmer says, these are not the same old Tories.

To be sure, they burst with contradictions, preaching both balanced budgets and massive public spending. It is a political force headed by a coterie that sneers at John Lewis while pretending to be on the side of those who aspire to shop there. Yet a project is taking shape, especially if one looks at those

two mayors, Houchen and Street. It is based around buildings and burning red tape, state-led investment and deregulation. It is about public investment rather than public services, Keynesianism without the welfare state. Call it capitalism with Brexit characteristics.

Faced with this, the natural tendency of Labour wonks is to fact-check this project into oblivion, to show all the ways in which Tweedledum disagrees with Tweedledee. But as the socialist intellectual Stuart Hall wrote while Thatcher was crushing Neil Kinnock in the 1987 general election: “People don’t vote for Thatcherism, in my view, because they believe the small print ... It invites us to think about politics in images. It is addressed to our collective fantasies, to Britain as an imagined community.”

The job of the centre-left is to offer some images of its own. Forget the shrunk, desiccated retail offers, forgotten by the next morning. Better to try to prove that you understand what voters want because you share their frustrations and hopes. So talk about what Labour would offer your community, your street. The genuinely affordable houses it would build, the childcare it would lay on, the care homes it would extract from the private equity barons. This would be about the state being on your side, rather than run for big business and select lobbyists. It would be supported by the leadership allowing Labour outside Westminster much deeper national and regional identities, to run ahead of the shadow cabinet, just as Preston city council has done with its guerrilla localism.

Finally the party should turn its constituency offices into community hubs, food banks, welfare advice centres – showing what Labour can do for voters even in long years out of office. Enough of mistaking focus groups for listening to people, of passing off professionalised caution as wisdom, of pretending top-down social democracy can fly in an era of polarisation and social impatience. Enough!

- Aditya Chakraborty is a Guardian columnist

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[OpinionLabour](#)

Hartlepool fell victim to the Labour leader's lack of vision

[Owen Jones](#)



Having lost a seat that Corbyn outperformed him in twice, it's Starmer who looks like the less than competent politician now



‘We are told we live in an age of post-truth politics, and the cheerleaders of the Labour leadership seem determined to prove it.’ Keir Starmer in Seaton Carew. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

‘We are told we live in an age of post-truth politics, and the cheerleaders of the Labour leadership seem determined to prove it.’ Keir Starmer in Seaton Carew. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Fri 7 May 2021 12.20 EDT

Blind panic. That’s the generous way to describe the expression etched on the face of Hartlepool’s Labour candidate when I [visited the constituency](#) and asked him the most basic question of all: what was his party’s vision for the country? He spluttered, rejected the premise of the question, and threw in platitudes about attracting the best businesses to this County Durham port town by improving child literacy.

This is not to slight Paul Williams, undoubtedly a talented GP rather than a miracle worker who can conjure up a vision for his party where none exists. Tony Benn once said there were two types of politician: a signpost and a weathervane. It would be unfair to describe Keir Starmer as the latter, because weathervanes are at least known to point, however fleetingly, in a direction. Today, we saw the fruits of a truly fascinating experiment: what happens when a political party fights an election campaign without a vision

or a coherent message against a government that has both in spades. And truly, it was [a bitter result](#).

We are told we live in an age of post-truth politics, and the cheerleaders of the Labour leadership seem determined to prove it. Everyone is to blame but them. They conjure up the spectre of Jeremy Corbyn, who has not been Labour leader for more than a year. Yet, according to Williams, [no one mentioned Corbyn](#) during the campaign, something I also found when I visited last week.

Here are the facts. From Theresa May's vantage point in 2017, seats like Hartlepool were for the winning. [Labour](#) was kneecapped in 2015, and following the 2016 EU referendum and the waning support for Ukip, votes were up for grabs. The Conservatives believed those who voted Ukip in 2015 – and, after all, rejected Ed Miliband's [Labour](#) – would simply march into the Tory column, delivering seats such as Hartlepool. But something else happened: [Labour](#) won a sizeable chunk of those Ukip voters, gaining the party's biggest vote share and majority since 2001. By 2019, many had defected to the Brexit party, but [Labour](#) still managed to retain the seat with an increased majority from 2015.

With these numbers in front of us, there are some obvious questions to be asked. If Corbyn is to blame, why did Hartlepool's citizens vote Labour twice under his leadership and in higher numbers than in 2015? What does it tell us, comparing 2017 to this year's election, that Tories won only 1,210 more votes while Labour has lost more than 13,000?

If Corbyn had been seen as a legitimate Labour leader, there would be no debate about learning lessons from the 2017 election: why was it insufficient for the party to win? When Owen Smith – Corbyn's defeated leadership challenger – declared Labour's success back then was down to the party's "[incredibly popular](#)" manifesto, that then uncontroversial conclusion accorded with the experiences of all his colleagues. Arguably, what unites the 2017 Labour manifesto and the current Conservative agenda is a coherent and bold vision for the country (albeit radically different ones), backed with cold hard cash.

But Starmer's team has decided there is nothing to be learned or salvaged from the Corbyn era, violating the promises made during Starmer's election campaign. Rather than [a new vision](#) being crafted, the void is being filled by soundbites gleaned from focus groups, echoing and affirming the current political climate – one in which the party doesn't thrive.

The Tories could have opted to do this during the 2008 financial crash, but instead they built their own version of events and repeated their own message with iron discipline – Labour spent too much, they didn't fix the roof while the sun was shining – until the focus groups repeated it back verbatim.

Starmer's team are on safari, knowing nothing about communities they didn't grow up in, leading to cosplay, caricature and [flag-waving](#), which screeches inauthenticity and nothing more. Yes, the party is the victim of long-term trends – not least as Labour-voting younger people empty from ex-industrial communities, leaving home-owning pensioners predisposed to the Tories – but Starmerism, whatever that is, has no answer to it, unlike the gleefully spendthrift Conservatives.

Labour's right is now on manoeuvres, but it has nothing to say: its intellectual cupboard is as empty as Tesco's toilet roll shelves at the start of the pandemic. While the Tories splash the cash, Labour is trapped in a pre-2015 rubric, fretting about fiscal responsibility. Much of Labour's leading echelons don't just lack a vision; on economic policy, they are to the right of Boris Johnson's Tories, and so we ended in the grotesque position of a Labour opposition – a *Labour* opposition – scuttling around TV studios arguing against Rishi Sunak's [corporation tax hike](#).

[If it is to ever win another election, Labour needs nothing less than refounding.](#) | [Neal Lawson](#)
[Read more](#)

Lacking a coherent analysis or solution, Labour's right will resort to the only tactic it knows – punching left. It will castigate the traditional aspirations of the Labour party as impossible dreams while the Tories spend, spend, spend, and will demonise anyone who has the audacity to champion them. Where

will this lead? Cast your eyes across the Channel, where Labour's European sister parties are in even direr straits.

Starmer's pitch was always relational – he was more capable than his predecessor and opponent. His team believed that by acting like the grownups in the room, like the characters in Bugsy Malone, it would all fall into place. But they bet the house on competence – a dividing line incinerated by the NHS's successful vaccine rollout – rather than a compelling alternative vision for the country. Having lost a seat that Corbyn outperformed him in twice, it's Starmer who looks like the less than competent politician now, with no values to compensate. Instead of pointing out what he stood against, he should have decided what he stood for. The electorate doesn't have a clue – and increasingly, it seems, neither does he.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

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The politics sketchElections 2021

So who are you again? Boris Johnson meets the new MP for Hartlepool

[John Crace](#)



PM tried not to gloat at Jill Mortimer's win, claiming no knowledge of Brexit party demise, vaccine bounce ... and even his new MP



Jill Mortimer, right, with Boris Johnson, who now needs to work out what ‘levelling up’ means.

Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

Jill Mortimer, right, with Boris Johnson, who now needs to work out what ‘levelling up’ means.

Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

Fri 7 May 2021 13.00 EDT

The real surprise was that anyone was surprised. Over the last few days the polls had looked desperate for Labour and it would have been astonishing if the [Conservatives](#) hadn’t easily won the Hartlepool byelection.

And sure enough those who had voted for the [Brexit](#) party in the 2019 general election moved en masse to the Tories and Hartlepool went blue for the first time since the constituency had been created back in the mid-1970s. So what with the end of the [Brexit](#) party and the vaccine bounce, the byelection had been an accident waiting to happen for Labour.

But part of the job description for any politician is to be able to look surprised by the entirely predictable, so it was inevitable that [Boris Johnson](#) would take the first train up to Hartlepool to do a quick victory lap. Though on arrival he was unnerved by one member of the welcoming committee.

“Who’s that woman hanging around in the background?” he asked the Tory party chair, Amanda Milling.

“That’s [Jill Mortimer](#),” Milling had replied.

“Who is she?”

“The new Conservative MP.”

“Cripes. Thanks for letting me know.”

“No problem. No one in Hartlepool really knows who she is either. She doesn’t come from round here and her whole campaign was based on knowing next to nothing about the constituency.”

“So how did she win?”

“Because she wasn’t representing [Labour](#) and, unbelievably, the [Labour](#) candidate was even worse. Now do try not to gloat too much as it’s not a great look. You’re here to look humble and promise to deliver whatever it was we promised to deliver on.”

Half an hour or so later, Boris stopped to do a brief interview with Sky as he walked along the seafront. Was it really such a shock to have won the byelection given the demise of the Brexit party and the vaccine bounce? Absolutely, said Johnson, somehow managing to sound sincere. The margin of victory had caught even him by surprise. Though he was delighted that voters had seen that the Conservatives had succeeded in getting Brexit done and he was now determined to deliver on his promise to level up across the country.

Just as soon as he had worked out what levelling up meant. The fact that levelling up and offering equality of opportunity were things that every government in the last 50 years had promised and failed to do was rather beside the point. For reasons that even Boris couldn’t quite fathom, voters seemed to trust him. Which was more than could be said for most of his family. To not know him is to love him. His friends were sick of his stories; the rest of the country seemed unable to get enough of them.

“Are you sure you don’t have a question for Jill?” Johnson said as the interview wound to a close. Er, no. No one wanted to speak to Jill. And no one seemed more pleased about that than Jill herself. She hadn’t had much to say in the campaign and she had nothing to add to that now.

Back in London, things were going from bad to worse for [Keir Starmer](#). It wasn’t just Hartlepool where Labour had tanked. It had also haemorrhaged support to the Tories in the local council elections. Not so much a defeat as a total humiliation. And now he too was obliged to give his first televised take on what had been a disastrous set of election results.

[Keir Starmer: Labour has spent too long talking to ourselves](#)
[Read more](#)

“I take full responsibility,” he began. The Labour leader tried to sound bullish. As if he understood the problem and had the answers. But he looked crushed. Devastated even. He had been expecting a bad day, but this was way worse than his worst fears. He went on to say he would do whatever it took to make Labour electable again, but he was really out of ideas. Other than by trying to reinvent himself as a populist who would promise to give the country whatever it said it wanted.

It wasn’t a question of left and right, he insisted. Labour needed to stop quarrelling and face the country – something that might have been more convincing if the first response of the party had not been for its two competing wings to kick lumps out of one another. Labour also needed to reflect and understand. Most voters will probably be remembering that Starmer had said much the same when he had become leader more than a year ago; but maybe reflection and understanding takes longer than he thought.

What Labour needed most of all, though, was a bold vision, he added. And what was this bold vision? It was this vision that was bold. Starmer didn’t get any further than this as Sky news broke off the interview in mid-sentence to go live to [Liverpool where Joanne Anderson](#) had been elected city mayor. It just about summed up Starmer’s day. Wherever the bold vision was, it wasn’t with him. For the moment he had been downgraded to an irrelevance. It was going to be a long way back for him and for Labour.

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[South Africa](#)

Zulu queen's will designates Prince Misuzulu as heir

Succession battle in South Africa takes latest turn after king and queen both died within less than two months



Prince Misuzulu Zulu, the Zulu heir designate. Photograph: mzweh/Wikimedia commons

Prince Misuzulu Zulu, the Zulu heir designate. Photograph: mzweh/Wikimedia commons

Staff and agencies

Fri 7 May 2021 22.12 EDT

Prince Misuzulu Zulu – the eldest son of South Africa's late Zulu king Goodwill Zwelithini and his more recently deceased regent queen – has been designated heir to the monarchy amid a turbulent succession battle.

Misuzulu Zulu, 46, whose name means “strengthening the Zulus”, was named heir in the last will of his deceased mother and queen, Shiyiwe Mantfombi Dlamini Zulu. The will was read out on television on Friday.

Chaos ensued after the televised reading when the new successor’s brother, Prince Thokozani, stood up to voice an opinion. He was quickly shouted down by family members at the royal palace in coastal KwaZulu Natal province, and the newly named heir was then whisked away by heavily armed security.

Although the title of Zulu king does not bestow executive power, the charismatic Zwelithini had moral influence over more than 11 million Zulus, nearly a fifth of South Africa’s population.

[Succession battle rages as Zulu ruler buried in South Africa](#)

[Read more](#)

The 65-year-old queen and regent died on 30 April, weeks after she was named interim successor to Goodwill Zwelithini, the longest-serving leader of South Africa’s largest ethnic group.

Zwelithini passed away on 12 March at 72 following a battle with a diabetes-related illness. He had spent half a century on the throne. He left behind six wives and 28 children – setting up a turbulent succession battle.

I “hereby nominate and appoint Misuzulu Zulu ... as my successor to the throne”, said the late queen’s will, read out by advocate Griffiths Madonsela.

The letter that bequeathed the monarchy to her first son was dated 23 March, a day before she was named regent.

Since the death of the late queen, who was Zwelithini’s third wife and the sister of Eswatini’s King Mswati III, various factions in the royal family have sought to put forward their candidates to claim the throne.

Some alleged the regent was poisoned and that her husband’s signature was fraudulently added to his will. Allegations that the queen was poisoned have

been dismissed by family insiders as a misunderstanding of reports that traces of toxins had been found in her liver some time ago.

Flanked by singing and dancing Zulu regiments, Prince Zulu on Friday morning made a dramatic entrance at his mother's official memorial service, demonstrating his willingness to take over.

With Agence France-Presse

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[New York](#)

New York boy stuns family with \$2,618 Amazon order for SpongeBob popsicles

Noah Bryant, four, who is on the autism spectrum, sent a 51-case order of SpongeBob treats to his aunt's house



Order up! SpongeBob Squarepants is irresistible; his popsicles even more so, it seems. Photograph: Mark Mainz/AP

Order up! SpongeBob Squarepants is irresistible; his popsicles even more so, it seems. Photograph: Mark Mainz/AP

Guardian staff

Fri 7 May 2021 17.22 EDT

A four-year-old [New York](#) boy has left his family with a huge bill after he secretly ordered a staggering \$2,618 worth of SpongeBob popsicles from online retailer Amazon.

Noah Bryant, from Brooklyn, ordered 51 cases containing a total of 918 popsicles to be shipped to his aunt's house, the local TV station ABC7 [reported](#).

Amazon said they would not take back the treats, leaving Noah's mother, social work student Jennifer Bryant, facing the giant bill.

But the story has a happy ending. Amazon now says they are in contact with the Bryant family and will donate the proceeds of the popsicles to a local charity. Meanwhile, a [GoFundMe page](#) has raised more than \$11,000.

The family says all additional funds will go towards Noah's education, [ABC7 said](#). Noah is on the autism spectrum.

“As a parent to a child living with ASD [autism spectrum disorder], all additional donations will go towards Noah's education and additional supports. We cannot thank you enough. Truly,” Jennifer Bryant wrote on the GoFundMe page.

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US news

‘Christchurch Call’: Biden backs New Zealand stand against online extremism

US joins call to action two years after Trump administration declined due to free speech concerns



New Zealanders celebrate the sentencing of white supremacist Brenton Tarrant to life in prison last August for killing 51 people in Christchurch in 2019. He broadcast his rampage live in Facebook. Photograph: Sanka Vidanagama/AFP/Getty Images

New Zealanders celebrate the sentencing of white supremacist Brenton Tarrant to life in prison last August for killing 51 people in Christchurch in 2019. He broadcast his rampage live in Facebook. Photograph: Sanka Vidanagama/AFP/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse

Fri 7 May 2021 21.51 EDT

The United States will join an international bid to stamp out violent extremism online, the White House has said, two years after the Trump administration declined to do so.

The Biden administration spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Washington “will join the Christchurch Call to Action” in “a global pledge by member governments and technology partners to work together to address terrorist and violent extremist content online”.

The initiative is named after the New Zealand city where [a far-right gunman massacred 51 people at two mosques in 2019](#) while broadcasting his rampage live on Facebook.

[France planning to allow use of algorithms to detect extremism online](#)
[Read more](#)

“Countering the use of the internet by terrorists and violent extremists to radicalise and recruit is a significant priority for the United States,” Psaki said.

In 2019 the United States cited protecting free speech when it declined to join the call led by the [New Zealand](#) prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, and the French president, Emmanuel Macron, though Washington stressed that it did back the initiative’s aims.

Psaki said free speech remained a concern.

“The United States applauds language in the Christchurch Call emphasising the importance of respecting human rights and the rule of law, including the protection of freedom of expression,” her statement said.

“In joining the Christchurch Call, the United States will not take steps that would violate the freedoms of speech and association protected by the first amendment to the US constitution, nor violate reasonable expectations of privacy.”

She said the US will participate in a virtual summit on 14 May.

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The Pacific projectTonga

‘They need to care about our humanity’: death of Tongan LGBTQ+ activist sparks calls for reform

After the alleged murder of Polikalepo Kefu, Pacific LGBTQI groups are calling for change, including revoking sodomy laws



Phylesha Brown-Acton, a fakafifine woman from Tonga, is calling for legislators in the Pacific nation to revoke queerphobic laws and protect LGBTIQ+ people. Photograph: Supplied

Phylesha Brown-Acton, a fakafifine woman from Tonga, is calling for legislators in the Pacific nation to revoke queerphobic laws and protect LGBTIQ+ people. Photograph: Supplied

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[Leni Ma'ia'i](#)

Sat 8 May 2021 01.28 EDT

The large hall of the basilica in the Tongan capital Nuku'alofa, hasn't seen many crowds since Covid restrictions were introduced a year ago.

But on Thursday night, people from across all parts of society packed every inch of available space in the venue, clad mostly in black and the traditional woven ta'ovala dress.

Tongan authorities have granted an exemption to the 50-person cap on indoor gatherings, so that people from across the Pacific country can come together for a candlelight vigil in memory of LGBTQ+ and humanitarian activist Polikalepo "Poli" Kefu.

[Outpouring of grief after alleged murder of leading Tongan LGBTQI activist](#)
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Kefu, 41, a beloved leader in Tonga, was [killed on Saturday on a beach near his home in Lapaha](#). Police have charged a 27-year-old man with his murder. The death has sent shock waves through the small country and through its

LGBTQI+ community, who hope that it will spur action to tackle homophobic attitudes and to repeal the discriminatory laws in the country.

Among those who have come to pay tribute is a member of the country's royal family, Princess Frederica Tuita, who struggles through tears as she speaks about her close friend of nearly 20 years.

“Being Tongan means living as Poli did, embodying our society's values of love, humility, respect, and loyalty,” said Tuita.



Princess Frederica Tuita speaks at a candlelight vigil held in Tonga for Polikalepo Kefu. Photograph: Broadcom fm Broadcasting

As diplomatically as she can, considering her high-profile position, Princess Tuita proceeds with an indictment on Tonga for allowing Kefu's death to happen.

“Our society has yet to take command of the responsibility required to truly commit to those [Tongan] values, and implement them where it counts.”

Where it counts, Tuita implies, is in the greater protections of leiti people against the threat of hate crime.

The Tongan word *leitī* is one of the many descriptors across the Pacific region to recognise the diverse sexual and gender expressions in their populations.

“It’s more of a comfort word for the LGBTQ+ community. We just call everybody *leitī*, whether you are trans, a lesbian, or however you identify,” says Joey Joleen Mataele, founder of the Tonga *Leitīs* Association, who passed down her presidency to Kefu in 2018.

A man handed himself in to police on Monday and has been charged with Kefu’s murder. Tongan Police have not commented on whether they believe Kefu was the victim of a hate crime, or not.

The hashtag *#JusticeForPoli* has stayed trending as communities from around the South Pacific gather to host their own vigils. Specifically, the justice the Pacific LGBTQ+ groups are calling for is sweeping law reform, including the repeal of Tonga’s Criminal Offences Act, which makes sodomy punishable by up to 10 years in prison.



President of Tonga *Leitīs* Association Polikalepo Kefu who was killed in Tonga. Photograph: Twitter

These legal issues are not unique to Tonga. In popular tourist destinations like Samoa and Cook Islands, homosexual sex acts are punishable by a

prison sentence.

Samoa, which has hosted fa'afafine – understood in western terms as the third, non-binary gender – beauty pageants since the 1970s, only repealed laws criminalising the “impersonation” of females in 2013.

According to Phylesha Brown-Acton, a fakafifine (a Niuean gender identity designation) woman and executive director of F'ine Pasifika, these discriminatory laws empower some members of the community to feel comfortable acting in hateful ways toward leiti people.

“It gives people the permission to further treat leiti worse than dogs. I’m sorry to say, but in Tonga, Tonga has a Dog Act. Dogs have vets and doctors that look after them. There’s absolutely nothing for the leiti, we’re seen as a lower class of animals such as a dog,” said Brown-Acton.

Ymania Brown, the co-secretary of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA World), works hand-in-hand with LGBTQ+ groups in the Pacific to help lobby for law reform.

“There are many, many variables to successfully change laws and some of those variables include the cultural attitudes of different countries, which are different between Pacific nations. To know what’s right for Papua New Guinea, is not right for the Solomon Islands, or for Tonga, or Samoa,” said Brown.

‘The police told me it was my fault’

Police in most Pacific nations do not specifically record incidents of hate crime, so getting conclusive data on how frequently these cases occur is difficult, but Brown-Acton has her own harrowing story of how bad it can be.

She says in 2007 she was the victim of an attempted gang-rape by a group of about 10 men.

She says they pinned her down and tried to tear her pants off, but she was able to get free and run for help. Brown-Acton immediately went to the

police to file a charge, but says her complaints were met with ambivalence.

“Basically the police were just like, ‘this is your fault, you should never have been there.’ Nothing eventuated. Nobody was held accountable,” said Brown-Acton. She believes she was attacked because she is queer and that police did not take her seriously for the same reason.

“I’m not isolated to being the only person that has had experienced this, leiṭi endure and experience violence, day after day”

Tongan Police deputy commissioner, Tevita Vailea said he wasn’t aware of this particular case but invited Brown-Acton to come forward to provide more information about the incident.

“Tongan police have come a long way in trying to develop our capacity and development of Tonga police,” said Vailea. “And part of that you see, is treating people in our society in a more fair and equitable way. So we are doing our best to encourage all victims of crime to come forward and report to us.”

By all accounts, police work into Poli’s death has been thorough and efficient. The accused murderer is remanded in custody and is due to appear at the magistrates court on 19 May. Investigations into the death are ongoing.

‘We must win our battle before the church’

Beyond policing, Brown-Acton says the fraught relationships between Pacific Island nations and their LGBTQ+ communities largely stems from the introduction of Christianity into the South Pacific from the 18th century.

Before missionaries arrived in the Pacific, all Pacific cultures were known to have wide acceptance of leiṭis, fa’afafine, and the many other sexual identities that make up the Pacific.

For religious institutions, which are a fundamental cornerstone of life in the Pacific Islands, the road to accepting these cultural practices has been long and complicated.

Joey, the founder of the Tonga leitīs Association, and a trans woman, remembers the shock on the faces of the congregation when in the late 1970s, she plucked up the courage to wear a dress to a busy Sunday mass. As far as she knows, she was the first first leitī to ever do it in Tonga.

“It was an electric blue pleated dress and I remember walking in that I turned a lot of heads, I was the biggest show of the day,” said Joey. “I don’t know if I was trying to make a statement, but I was just wanting to be me.”

Today, leitī in Tonga can mostly feel free to dress as they please in church, and they’re seeing acknowledgment by some religious institutions.

At Kefu’s vigil, Cardinal Soane Patita Paini Mafi, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Tonga, spoke of the community that “mourn together with the leitīs’ association.”

Ymania Brown, from ILGA World, says that while there may be some progress, there’s a long way to go.

“We need to win the battle in front of the church before we can win in front of the law reformers, because if we win it in front of the clergy, they will stand in front of us. They will actually argue for us, for our inclusion,” said Brown.

In the meantime, the Tongan Leitīs’ Association and various other LGBTQ+ groups are looking to push reform urgently in the legal system.

“It’s hard for me to say, yes, Poli’s death is going to result in wide sweeping changes, because a lot of it depends not on us, because we’re ready, it depends on legislators and parliamentarians in the Pacific to stand up and develop a backbone. They need to care enough about humanity to say, yes, this is a group of people that need protection and then we can have changes,” said Brown.

In Australia, support is available at 1800Respect (1800 737 732). In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support for rape and sexual abuse on 0808 802 9999. In the US, Rainn offers support on 800-656-4673. Other international helplines can be found at ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html

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Healthcare industry

US health insurers report billions in first quarter as small providers face stress

UnitedHealth Group, reported \$4.9bn in profits in the first quarter of 2021 while CVS Health reported \$2.2bn



The higher than anticipated profits prompted UnitedHealth Group to raise its projections for the year. Photograph: Jim Mone/AP

The higher than anticipated profits prompted UnitedHealth Group to raise its projections for the year. Photograph: Jim Mone/AP

[Amanda Holpuch](#) in New York

[@holpuch](#)

Sat 8 May 2021 05.00 EDT

US health insurance companies beat analyst expectations and reported billions in profits in the first quarter of 2021, after making [a windfall](#) in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The insurers' success comes as small healthcare providers face unprecedented financial stress and millions of Americans struggle [to cover health costs](#). The large profits reaped by the insurance firms are also likely to increase criticism of the US healthcare sector.

[‘Your mouth becomes a minefield’: the Americans who can’t afford the dentist](#)
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The nation's largest health insurer, UnitedHealth Group, reported \$4.9bn in profits in the first quarter of 2021 compared to \$3.4bn in the same period in 2020 – a 44% increase. The higher than anticipated profits prompted the company to raise its projections for the year.

Anthem also beat estimates in its report of \$1.67bn in profits in the first three months of 2021, a 9.5% increase from the same period last year. Humana's net income was \$828m in the first quarter, a 75% increase from the same period the year before.

CVS Health, which owns the Aetna health insurance provider and drugstores, reported \$2.2bn in profits, up from \$2bn in the same quarter a year before.

Cigna said on Friday its net income fell to \$1.17bn from \$1.19bn in the same period last year, but it still raised its forecasts for the year. Together, the companies represent the country's five biggest health insurers by membership.

Insurers' financial success is not reflected across the healthcare system. Small healthcare providers such as independent doctor's office and rural hospitals have been in a financial crunch, or closed, during the pandemic. [Emergency medical service systems](#) and some [larger hospitals](#) have also been under severe financial pressure.

Health insurers have been insulated from this stress because there were sharp declines in expensive, elective procedures, such as hip replacement surgery. People also delayed or skipped doctor's appointments because of fears of Covid-19's spread or concerns about the cost of medical care during a recession.

Allison Hoffman, a health law expert at the University of Pennsylvania, explained: "Insurers' Covid-related costs have been far smaller than their pandemic-related savings."

Last year, insurers warned medical use could soar when Covid-19 cases decrease and people are more comfortable visiting a doctor's office. In earnings calls this quarter, health insurance executives said they expect medical use to be normal or slightly above normal, but not extreme, in the second half of the year.

Anthem's executive vice-president and chief financial officer, John Gallina, said it was too early to see pent-up demand.

"Folks were able to get access to care in 2020 when a lot of the stay-at-home rules were relaxed," Gallina told analysts. "So at this point in time, we are taking a very cautious approach, certainly monitoring all of the variables, but we still believe that our original outlook for utilization is appropriate and prudent."

CVS Health's chief financial officer and executive vice-president, Eva Boratto, said in an earnings call this week: "Covid-19 is expected to have a minimal impact on consolidated financial results for the year."

Insurers are required to return part of the profits to the individuals and employers who use their services because of the Affordable Care Act's cap on insurance company profits.

Some insurers potentially offset some share of the rebates by reducing premiums or providing a premium credit to people in 2020. Many also [waived treatment fees for insured patients with Covid-19](#). Those waivers are now [being phased out](#).

Anthem, UnitedHealth and Aetna rolled back the waivers this year, while Humana has dropped them for some customers. Covid-19 vaccinations and most coronavirus tests are still free for people under federal law.

The California representative Katie Porter was one of 10 Democratic representatives [to write to](#) Anthem, UnitedHealth and CVS Health last week to ask them to continue covering costs for Covid-19 treatment. “To do anything less can and will harm the members who pay your salaries and who you are committed to serve,” wrote the members, including Pramila Jayapal, of Washington, and Cori Bush, of Missouri.

The insurers’ lobby America’s Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) said that [an August statement](#) from its president and CEO, Matt Eyles, still reflected the lobby’s position on profits during the pandemic. “American consumers, businesses and taxpayers are protected by provisions in federal and state laws that require health insurance providers to deliver premium rebates and put money back into their pockets,” Eyles said.

Hoffman predicted insurers would be under more legislative and public pressure to answer for high profits if they continue into the year.

“I don’t necessarily blame them for last year, because nobody could have predicted what the year looked like,” Hoffman said. “But when you come out with such high profits at the end of the year, maybe you use this as an opportunity to do some good things in return.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/08/us-health-insurance-companies-2021-first-quarter>

Headlines thursday 6 may 2021

- [Jersey Fishing leader says French threats 'close to act of war'](#)
- [Exclusive NHS Covid jab booking site leaks people's vaccine status](#)
- [Live Elections 2021: voters head to polls across Scotland, Wales and England](#)
- ['Super Thursday' Polls open as Starmer promises to 'carry the can' for Labour election results](#)

Jersey

Jersey row: fishing leader says French threats ‘close to act of war’

Don Thompson says response from France is ‘like something you would see from Iran or Russia’



French fishers are threatening a blockade at St Helier on Thursday.
Photograph: Allard Schager/Alamy

French fishers are threatening a blockade at St Helier on Thursday.
Photograph: Allard Schager/Alamy

[Lisa O'Carroll](#) *Brexit correspondent*

[@lisaocarroll](#)

Thu 6 May 2021 03.44 EDT

France's response to post-Brexit fishing restrictions around the island of Jersey has been described as “pretty close to an act of war” by fishing community leaders in St Helier. They say they have been told 100 boats are

being lined up in France for a [6am blockade](#) at the main Channel Island port on Thursday, threatening food and energy supplies.

“It was inevitable that the French would kick off,” said the head of the Jersey Fishermen’s Association, Don Thompson. “But the reaction we’re seeing from France is almost like something you would see from Iran or Russia. They’re not just saying they can [cut off the electricity supply](#), French fishermen are saying that they’re coming tomorrow [Thursday] to blockade the harbour in time to stop the ferries from coming in so there’ll be no food supply and no fuel coming into the island either. So it comes pretty close to an act of war, this.”

The French maritime minister hinted on Tuesday that [France](#) could cut off electricity supplies to Jersey in retaliation for restrictions the self-governing island has imposed on French vessels.

At the centre of the dispute is post-Brexit arrangements for the shared waters in the 13-mile stretch between France and Jersey. New licences were issued on Friday, the last day of a four-month grace period after [Brexit](#), which ended the Granville Bay treaty on shared fishing rights which dates back to 1839.

[Map](#)

Thompson argues the treaty was flawed and “gave the French the authority to write their own access permits for waters, and consequently we’ve seen a decline in the primary shellfish stocks.” He said Brexit had given [Jersey](#) the authority to manage its own waters and for the first time it was exercising its legal right to apply conditions in line with sustainability goals.

But not everyone in the local fishing sector agrees. The island’s leading oyster and mussel fisherman, Chris Le Masurier, is scathing and says the problem is not Brexit but the local government’s “incompetent bunch of idiots”.

“I am so drained after this weekend because every French fisherman I know phoned me to complain,” he said. “I have been dealing with France for 30 years and I’ve learned there is a way to deal with our closest neighbour,” he

[told the local online news outlet Bailiwick Express](#). “It seems that the new licences were sent out Friday and then everyone ran out of the office. It was a complete insult to the French. It’s as if an apprentice who started on Friday has issued the licences. This has all been done in a pathetic way.”

At stake are just 70 French vessels fishing mainly shellfish including scallops, whelks and lobster. Jersey issued licences to the 41 French boats over 12 metres on Friday but French politicians claimed that without any notice they came with restrictions on the number of fishing days and the fishing equipment allowed.

00:52

Dozens of French boats gather at Jersey port in protest – video

One French national assembly member, Bertrand Sorre, said a fisher from Granville who fished for scallops and whelks “on average 40 days a year” in Jersey waters had been told he would have access for only 11 days. “The anger is roaring and the desire to do battle is palpable,” Sorre said.

Jean-Marc Julienne, the president of the House of Normandy and La Manche, Normandy’s representation in Jersey, said it was vital the dispute was resolved quickly.

“I am worried that the situation could get out of control,” he said, “and I don’t want it to get to that point because we know very well that after that it will be very hard to restart the negotiations.”

- This article was amended on 6 May 2021 to clarify the date of the Granville Bay treaty

[Coronavirus](#)

NHS Covid jab booking site leaks people's vaccine status

Exclusive: Health service revising its process in England as 'shocking failure' allows access to medical data

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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The website allows anyone who possesses basic personal details of a friend, colleague or stranger to find out what should be confidential information. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The website allows anyone who possesses basic personal details of a friend, colleague or stranger to find out what should be confidential information. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Alex Hern](#) *Technology editor*
[@alexhern](#)

Thu 6 May 2021 05.37 EDT

NHS Digital is revising its process for booking Covid vaccinations in [England](#) after the discovery of a “seriously shocking failure” that leaked medical data from the site.

The website lets users make appointments using their [NHS](#) number or, if they do not have it to hand, some basic identity information. But in the process, users’ vaccination status is disclosed, allowing anyone who possesses basic personal details of a friend, colleague or stranger to find out what should be confidential medical information.

Employers would therefore, in theory, be able to trivially find out which of their staff had been vaccinated, for instance, while others may feel under pressure not to get the vaccine for fear of criticism from anti-vaccination friends or colleagues.

The problem comes because of the different responses the vaccination website gives to users based on their vaccination status. For users who have not had any jabs, entering personal details takes them straight through to a standard screening page, while for users who have had their first shot and booked their second, they are presented with a screen asking for their booking reference to continue.

But for those people who have received both vaccinations, simply entering the basic biographical information takes them straight to a page that says “you have had both of your appointments”. Worst of all, for those users who have had only one jab through a GP and have not booked a second, the screen lets them book their follow-up then and there, without any further verification.

“This is a seriously shocking failure to protect patients’ medical confidentiality at a time when it could not be more important,” said Silkie Carlo, the director of privacy group Big Brother Watch.

“This online system has left the population’s Covid vaccine statuses exposed to absolutely anyone to pry into. Date of birth and postcode are fields of data

that can be easily found or bought, even on the electoral roll.

“This is personal health information that could easily be exploited by companies, insurers, employers or scammers. Robust protections must be put in place immediately and an urgent investigation should be opened to establish how such basic privacy protections could be missing from one of the most sensitive health databases in the country.”

A spokesperson for the national data guardian for health and social care, who regulates the use of medical data, confirmed the concerns. “The office of the national data guardian has been contacted by two individuals about the way that the coronavirus booking website works,” she said.

[Early cancer diagnoses plummeted in England during Covid pandemic](#)
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“It is important that it is as simple and easy as possible for people to book their vaccinations and we understand that the website has been developed to support this aim. The NDG has contacted the organisations which run the website to ensure that they are aware of the concerns that have been raised and will discuss with them the twin important aims of protecting confidentiality whilst maintaining easy access to vaccinations for the public.”

NHS Digital said it was working to revise the pages, and a spokesperson said: “The online ‘book a coronavirus vaccination’ service has enabled millions of people to book their vaccinations quickly and easily, with over 17m first and second dose appointments made in over four months.

“The system does not have any direct access to anyone’s medical record and people should not be fraudulently using the service – it should only be used by people booking their own vaccines or for someone who has knowingly provided their details for this purpose.”

[Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)

[Local elections](#)

Voters head to polls across Scotland, Wales and England for devolved and local elections – as it happened

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Keir Starmer

Polls open as Starmer promises to ‘carry the can’ for Labour election results

Keir Starmer says he will take responsibility if results go badly, as MPs warn of ‘apathy’ among voters

- [‘Super Thursday’ elections: what to expect in England, Scotland and Wales](#)



Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner campaigning in Birmingham on Wednesday. Photograph: Reuters

Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner campaigning in Birmingham on Wednesday. Photograph: Reuters

[Heather Stewart](#) *Political editor*

Thu 6 May 2021 02.13 EDT

Voters are going to the polls for what has been dubbed Super Thursday, with ballots being cast across England, Scotland and Wales in the largest test of political opinion outside of a general election.

In England, as well as local council and mayoral contests, the Hartlepool parliamentary byelection is being watched as a battleground that [Labour](#) is desperate to retain. Hartlepool was held by [Labour](#) with a majority of 3,595 in 2019 even as other bricks in the so-called “red wall” crumbled – in part due to the Brexit party splitting the Tory vote.

Voting ends at 10pm, with some key results expected overnight including Hartlepool, though much of the counting is due to stretch through the weekend and into Monday.

Keir Starmer is braced for a challenging 48 hours ahead , as his critics prepare to seize on weaknesses in Labour’s performance to demand a fresh approach.

After a leaked poll showed the party on course to lose badly in the Hartlepool byelection, the Labour leader said he would take responsibility if the results of Thursday’s polls were disappointing.

“When things go right, the leader takes the plaudits; when they don’t go right, the leader carries the can and takes responsibility,” he said on the campaign trail in Birmingham. “That’s what I will do with these elections, as I will do in everything that the Labour party does.

“I’m conscious, the whole party is conscious, that this is but a step on the road to the next general election.”

Crisscrossing England on the final day of campaigning, Starmer also visited a food bank in Pontefract with Labour’s West Yorkshire mayoral candidate, Tracy Brabin.

Thousands of council seats across England will be contested on Thursday, as well as every seat in the Scottish parliament and Welsh Senedd, and English mayoralities including in the West Midlands, Teesside and London.

[Labour aims to defy polls in key West Midlands mayoral vote](#)

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Starmer's team are acutely aware that Hartlepool's will be one of the few results announced by Friday morning, with ballots in most local council and mayoral elections not being counted overnight.

With some critical MPs preparing to break cover and question the leadership's approach to winning back voters in Labour's former heartlands, that could allow a downbeat narrative to take hold before results have been announced for areas where Starmer's team hopes to do better.

The Guardian [revealed on Tuesday](#) that Labour's canvassing in Hartlepool suggested only 40% of the party's previous supporters had pledged to vote for its candidate, Paul Williams.

Boris Johnson played down the Tories' prospects of stealing the seat on Wednesday, insisting his party were "fighting for every vote".

Campaigning in the West Midlands, where Conservative Andy Street is expected to retain the mayoralty, the prime minister said: "I think Andy Street has done an outstanding job in the West Midlands, I think Ben Houchen is a fantastic mayor in Teesside and obviously we are fighting for every vote in Hartlepool.

"But these are tough contests and Hartlepool in particular you'd have to say, that hasn't been a Conservative since its inception – 46 years ago or whatever it was. So I think that will be a very tough fight but I hope everybody gets out to vote."

During the campaign, the Tories have highlighted investment in local infrastructure and national spending pledges, including plans to hire 20,000 new nurses.

Labour MPs across England contacted by the Guardian about the mood on the doorstep warned of "apathy" among voters. Some complained about Labour's lack of concrete proposals to sell to a sceptical electorate. "There is zero policy," said one frontbencher.

“People don’t really know what we stand for, so we’re having to fall back on the time-honoured tradition of anti-Tory sentiment,” complained another MP.

“The focus of getting people to vote Labour who did previously and don’t any more is the right one – but it’s the way they’ve done it,” said a leftwing backbencher. “They’ve approached it in a way which is a caricature of northern, working-class people: beer, fish and chips and flags.”

Several warned that the Green party were eating into Labour’s support in some areas, attracting voters who had previously warmed to Jeremy Corbyn, while Labour does not yet appear to be replacing them by winning over ex-Tory voters.

“We’re getting eaten now at both ends of our support,” said a former shadow cabinet minister. “We need to redouble our efforts now to show people that we’re in business.”

Starmer’s team said they had been hampered by the difficulty of on-the-ground campaigning and the struggle to get their message across during the pandemic. “In some ways, these elections have come too soon for us,” said a senior party strategist.

[Party leaders brace for Super Thursday: Politics Weekly podcast](#)
[Read more](#)

They pointed to the long-term realignment that has seen Labour’s vote share falling across a swath of seats in former industrial areas, as their demographics have changed over the past decade.

But a poor performance is nevertheless likely to intensify recent calls for Starmer to reshuffle his shadow cabinet, some of whom have struggled to make a significant impact on the public consciousness.

In Scotland, where the new Labour leader, Anas Sarwar, has only been in place for a few weeks, the party is nevertheless hoping to see what one insider called “red shoots” appearing.

Sarwar gave an upbeat speech at a drive-in political rally in Glasgow on Wednesday, where he was preceded by the former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown, who urged voters to be proud of voting for the party.

Speaking to journalists afterwards, Sarwar, a former MP, conceded that winning the Hartlepool byelection would be difficult for his party.

“Hartlepool is a really, really challenging seat. I don’t think we can escape the fact that there was a huge Brexit party vote in the last election; that poses its own challenge.”

The Scottish national party leader Nicola Sturgeon’s push for a second independence referendum means the stakes are high in the Holyrood contest.

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- [Pfizer Two doses give over 95% protection, shows Israel study](#)
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A couple walk past a coronavirus graphic in a vaccination centre in Jerusalem, Israel. Photograph: Debbie Hill/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

A couple walk past a coronavirus graphic in a vaccination centre in Jerusalem, Israel. Photograph: Debbie Hill/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

[Sarah Boseley](#) *Health editor*

Wed 5 May 2021 19.01 EDT

Two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine have proved more than 95% effective against infection, hospitalisation and death from Covid-19 in [Israel](#), the country with the highest proportion of its population vaccinated in the world, research has found.

One shot of the vaccine was partially effective, offering 58% protection against infection, 76% against hospitalisation, and 77% against death. The authors of the observational study [in the Lancet medical journal](#) say this shows the importance of having the second shot.

Their study demonstrates the power of vaccines to end the toll of coronavirus, they say. “These findings suggest that high vaccine uptake can meaningfully stem the pandemic and offers hope for eventual control of the Sars-CoV-2 outbreak as vaccination programmes ramp up across the rest of the world,” they wrote.

Lead author, Dr Sharon Alroy-Preis, of the Israel ministry of health, said: “Until this point, no country in the world had described the national public health impact of a nationwide Covid-19 vaccination campaign. These insights are hugely important because, while there are still some considerable challenges to overcome, they offer real hope that Covid-19 vaccination will eventually enable us to control the pandemic.”

But many other countries will not be able to imitate Israel, commentators in the journal say.

“Regrettably, rapid population-level coverage cannot be easily replicated in many other countries. The global use of the [Pfizer/BioNTech] vaccine is limited by supply issues, high costs, and ultra-cold chain storage requirements,” wrote Prof Eyal Leshem of the Chaim Sheba Medical Centre in Israel, and Prof Annelies Wilder-Smith of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, who were not involved in the study.

Israel has used only the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, which the company supplied on the understanding that data from the vaccination programme would be published to demonstrate its real-world efficacy.

The country had a national lockdown from 27 December 2020 until 7 March 2021 because of a big surge in infections, which peaked in January. By 3 April, 72% of adults over 16 and 90% of the over-65s had received two doses of the vaccine. As in the UK, the dominant strain of the virus has been the “Kent” variant, B117. Some cases of the “South African” variant, B1351, have been found latterly, but too few to be taken into account.

By seven days after the second dose, the vaccine was giving people 95.3% protection against infection and 96.7% protection against death. Protection against symptomatic and asymptomatic infection was 97.0% and 91.5%, respectively. Protection against hospital admission was 97.2% overall. By 14 days after the second dose, the protection had risen slightly further.

The authors, some of whom declared shares in Pfizer, wrote that “relying on protection against Covid-19 from a single dose might not be prudent”. The vaccine was developed to be given as two shots and substantially higher levels of antibodies have been observed after the second dose.

“Additionally, little is known about the duration of protection of one dose and how it compares with the durability after two doses. It is possible that one dose will provide a shorter duration of protection than two doses, particularly in an environment where new Sars-CoV-2 variants continue to emerge,” they wrote.

In a separate study [published in the BMJ](#) on Thursday, researchers from Denmark and Norway revealed their investigations into the blood clots that have been linked to the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. They looked at 280,000 people aged 18-65 who received a first dose of the vaccine in the two countries in February and March.

They found more clots in the veins than would be expected, although the events were still rare – 11 per 100,000 vaccinations. There were 2.5 clots in the veins of the brain per 100,000 jabs.

In [a linked opinion](#), Prof Paul Hunter at the University of East Anglia, said the study did not change the conclusions of the UK and European medicine

regulators that the benefits of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine far outweigh its risks for most age groups.

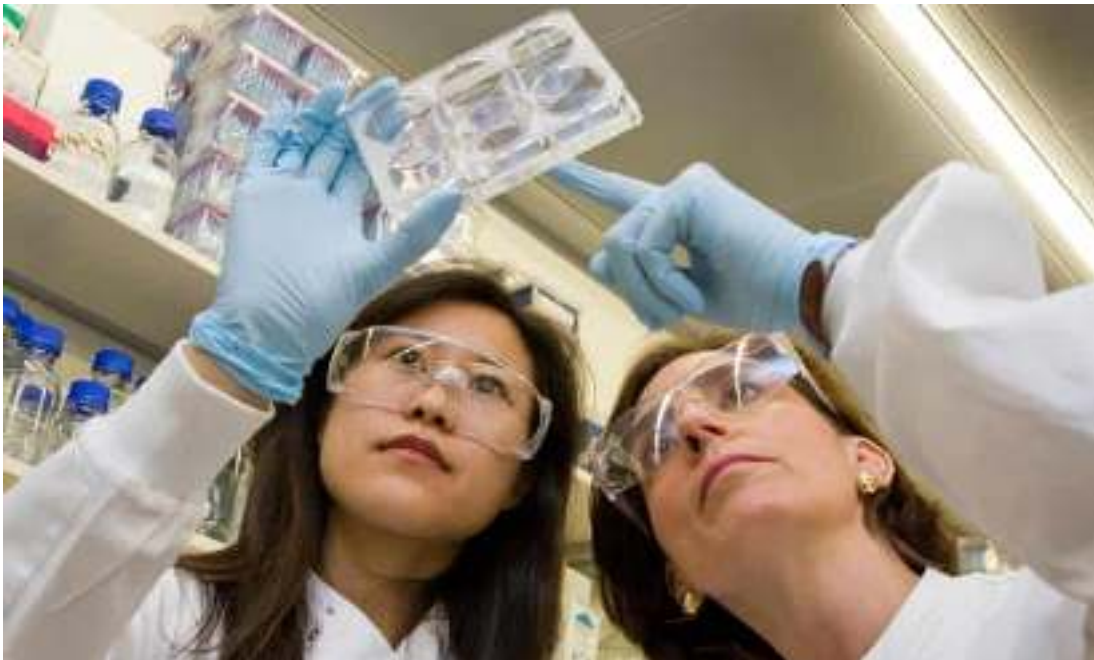
“Those countries that delayed their own vaccination programmes at a time of high transmission rates by declining to use available Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines should know that their decision will have contributed to an increase in the number of avoidable deaths from Covid-19,” he writes.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/05/two-pfizer-covid-vaccine-doses-give-over-95-protection-shows-israel-study>

Cancer

Early cancer diagnoses plummeted in England during Covid pandemic

Official figures spark fears that patients may miss out on treatment until it is too late



The number of people in England diagnosed with stage one cancer was down 33% in March-June 2020 compared with a year earlier. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

The number of people in England diagnosed with stage one cancer was down 33% in March-June 2020 compared with a year earlier. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

[Denis Campbell](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 14.45 EDT

The number of people being diagnosed with cancer early in [England](#) has plummeted during the Covid pandemic, sparking fears that many will only

be treated when it is too late to save them.

Official figures show a third fewer cancers were detected at stage one, when the chances of survival are highest, in the early months of the pandemic than during the same months a year before.

Cancer experts fear that the figures, which have been collected by Public Health England's [National Cancer Registration and Analysis Service](#), mean thousands of people have the disease but have not yet started treatment because of "a shift to later diagnosis". They urged anyone with possible symptoms of the disease to get them checked out immediately.

"While it's fantastic that Covid rates are dropping and lockdown is easing, the knock-on impact of the pandemic on cancer care cannot be overstated," said Steven McIntosh, the executive director of advocacy and communications at Macmillan [Cancer](#) Support. "We are likely to be dealing with Covid's long shadow for many years to come."

While 18,400 people in England had their cancer diagnosed at stage one between March and June 2019, this dropped by 33% to 12,400 in the same period last year – a fall of 1,500 people a month.

[Stage one cancer graphic](#)

Those months in 2020 were when the first wave of the pandemic led to disruption of normal [NHS](#) services and left many patients who needed care for a range of non-Covid conditions too scared to visit the GP or hospital in case they became infected.

Macmillan Cancer Support, which obtained the data, said the sharp fall could mean some cancers have now progressed to a point where they can no longer be treated because of the delays in diagnosis.

McIntosh said: "There are major concerns that there may be a shift to later diagnosis as a result of later presentations and longer waits. When cancer is diagnosed at a later or more advanced stage, it can be more difficult to treat or may be incurable, which can have a huge impact on a person's treatment and prognosis.

“This data supports the widespread concern that the disruption caused by Covid-19 will lead to many people being diagnosed with more advanced cancer due to reduced numbers going to their GP with symptoms, delayed tests and longer waiting times.”

[Cancer: first treatment graphic](#)

Citing lengthening waits for diagnostic tests and cancer care, McIntosh added: “From the calls we’re getting to Macmillan’s advice line we’re hearing that it is the most worrying time in recent history to get a cancer diagnosis. Many [patients] are living with the knowledge that delays could affect the success of their treatment, and possibly their chances of survival.”

It appears that disproportionate numbers of people with early signs of cancer did not seek or could not obtain NHS care as the pandemic wreaked havoc. In contrast, the number of people diagnosed with advanced or stage four cancer – by which time their cancer has spread and they cannot be cured – fell much less dramatically than those detected at stage one. The number of stage four diagnoses fell over the same period by 15% from 10,900 in 2019 to 9,200 in 2020.

A new Macmillan analysis of NHS performance data on cancer care in the wake of Covid has revealed falls in the number of people in England who are able to access cancer care within timescales supposedly guaranteed under the NHS constitution.

[Cancer surgery graphic](#)

Eleven per cent fewer people had cancer surgery in February 2021 compared with February 2020, and just 69.7% of patients started their cancer treatment within the maximum 62 days in February – the lowest percentage ever – even though the NHS target is 85%, the analysis found. About 370,000 fewer people with suspected cancer saw a specialist between March 2020 and February 2021 and the same period a year earlier – a 15% drop.

It would take the NHS 18 months working at 110% capacity to catch up on missing cancer diagnoses and 15 months to clear the cancer treatment backlog, Macmillan estimates.

Sir David Nicholson, the boss of the NHS in England until 2014, recently warned that [the size of the backlog of care](#) caused by the pandemic was “truly frightening” and that long delays for surgery and other treatment are set to become a problem for the government. “The whole issue of access [to care] is a greater threat to the NHS than privatisation because poor access undermines confidence among those people who fund the service – taxpayers,” he said.

NHS Providers, which represents health service trusts in England, believes it could take between three and five years for some hospitals to treat everyone in their own backlog. Recent research by pollsters Ipsos Mori found that “improving waiting times for routine operations” is the change in the NHS that the public most want to see, with 50% identifying that as their top priority.

[Health Foundation analysis](#) found that 4.6 million fewer people received planned treatment in hospital during 2020 than in 2019 and that GPs referred 6 million fewer patients to hospital during that period.

Clare Turnbull, a professor of translational cancer genetics at the Institute of Cancer Research, said: “Covid is important but cancer is a significant health problem. You don’t want to miss the window of your cancer being picked up and treated while it can be cured and you have a normal life expectancy.

“The danger is that if you pass through that window then your cancer turns out to have progressed and no longer be treatable. So people with possible signs of cancer should contact their GP ... and everyone, whether symptomatic or asymptomatic, should attend cancer screening appointments when they are invited.”

A spokesperson for the NHS said: “Fewer people came forward for checks earlier in the pandemic but our message has been the same throughout – come and get checked if you have a worrying symptom.

“Thanks to the hard work of NHS staff, the majority of cancer treatment has continued over the last year and the most recent data shows that, in February, 174,000 were referred for urgent checks with over 90% seen

within two weeks, and 22,000 people began treatment, 95% within a month.”

Join a Guardian Live discussion at how the NHS has performed during the pandemic, amid new government plans for another reorganisation. With Denis Campbell, Dr Rachel Clarke and Sir David Nicholson on Wednesday 12 May, 7pm BST | 8pm CEST | 11am PDT | 2pm EDT. Book tickets [here](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/05/early-cancer-diagnoses-plummeted-in-england-during-covid-pandemic>

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Canada

Canada becomes first country to approve Pfizer vaccine for children 12-15

- Officials say vaccine is safe and effective in younger age group
- ‘We are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel’



Canada's federal government has bought tens of millions of doses of vaccines but critics complain the pace of inoculation is lagging. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Canada's federal government has bought tens of millions of doses of vaccines but critics complain the pace of inoculation is lagging. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Reuters in Ottawa

Wed 5 May 2021 15.22 EDT

Canada has become the first nation in the world to authorise the use of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine in children aged 12 to 15, describing the move as a light at the end of the tunnel.

Supriya Sharma, a senior adviser at the Canadian federal health ministry, said on Wednesday that the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was safe and effective in the younger age group.

"We are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel," she told reporters. A health ministry spokesperson confirmed Canada was the first country to allow children of those ages to receive the Pfizer medicine.

The US Food and Drug Administration is expected to take a similar step "very soon", US health officials said.

Separately, authorities reported the third death of a Canadian from a rare blood clot condition after receiving AstraZeneca vaccine. The man, who was in his 60s, lived in the Atlantic province of New Brunswick.

Jennifer Russell, the chief medical officer of health in New Brunswick, said the province would continue using the AstraZeneca vaccine. Alberta reported a death from clotting on Tuesday and Quebec announced one on 27 April.

"There will be rare cases where thrombosis will occur. However, the risks remain minimal compared to the risks, complications and potential consequences of Covid," Russell told reporters.

[The healthcare team bringing vaccines – and hope – to Toronto's most Covid vulnerable](#)

[Read more](#)

Canada's federal government has bought tens of millions of doses of vaccines but critics complain the pace of inoculation is lagging due to bottlenecks in the 10 provinces, which are responsible for administering the doses.

Alberta will become the first province to offer Covid-19 vaccines to everyone aged 12 and over from 10 May, the premier, Jason Kenney, said on Wednesday, a day after he introduced tighter public health measures to combat a third wave of the pandemic.

Alberta, home to Canada's oil patch, has the highest rate per capita of Covid in the country, with nearly 24,000 active cases and 150 people in intensive care.

About 20% of the 1,249,950 cases of Covid in Canada have been reported in people under the age of 19. Canada has recorded 24,396 deaths.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/05/canada-pfizer-vaccine-children-coronavirus>

2021.05.06 - Spotlight

- ['I seek a kind person' The Guardian ad that saved my Jewish father from the Nazis](#)
- [200 years young Your birthday messages to the Guardian](#)
- [From the archive special CP Scott's centenary essay – podcast](#)
- ['Stuff of legends' Editors around world salute the Guardian](#)

‘I seek a kind person’: the Guardian ad that saved my Jewish father from the Nazis

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/may/06/guardian-200-ad-that-saved-jewish-father-from-nazis>

The Guardian has always been devoted to journalism that perseveres after the truth, challenges the powerful and amplifies stories about people that might not otherwise be heard.

It's a devotion that has now lasted two centuries. Few things make it to this ripe old age. We're older than most countries, almost all political parties and pretty much every animal on the planet.

In 200 years, the Guardian has grown from a weekly newspaper serving a few thousand Manchester liberals to a global operation with newsrooms in the UK, US and Australia, tens of millions of regular readers all over the world and more than 1.5 million supporters in 180 countries. These supporters protect our precious independence, power our investigative work and allow everyone to read, listen to and watch high-impact, quality journalism.

So this is a moment to celebrate, to take stock of where we have come from, what we are for and where we are going. A work in progress.

We hope you'll join us as we mark this bicentenary throughout the month of May, starting with our very first [digital festival](#). There are also three things we invite you to do, via this special page...

Send us a birthday message

We'd love to hear what you value most about the Guardian, how you came to read us, and what you'd like to see in the next 200 years of journalism? Or, feel free just to send birthday wishes.

[Write your message](#)

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[The Audio Long Read](#)
[The Guardian](#)

From the archive special: CP Scott's centenary essay – podcast

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The Guardian For 200 years

[Guardian 200Media](#)

‘Stuff of legends’: editors around world salute the Guardian on 200 years



Editors and senior figures at publications around the world, from El País to the New York Times, have wished the Guardian a happy 200th anniversary.

Composite: Guardian

Editors and senior figures at publications around the world, from El País to the New York Times, have wished the Guardian a happy 200th anniversary.
Composite: Guardian

Leading newspaper editors and publishers have paid tribute as the Guardian celebrates its bicentenary

- [Editors' tributes on the Guardian's 200th birthday: the full list](#)
- Celebrate 200 years of independent Guardian journalism, and help power our future – [make a contribution](#), or [become a subscriber](#).

[*Alexandra Topping*](#)

Wed 5 May 2021 06.22 EDT

Leading newspaper editors and publishers from around the world have paid tribute to the Guardian, saluting its independence, influence and investigative courage as it celebrates its 200th anniversary.

Publishers from Hong Kong to Denmark, the US to Brazil remarked that the Guardian had remained true to its roots as a liberal voice championing reform.

“When you have been around 200 years as a media institution, that means you have something enduringly valuable to offer the public,” said Marty Baron, the former editor of the [Washington Post](#), who retired in February. “The Guardian surely does. Its spirit of vigorous, independent, public-spirited journalism is a source of admiration and inspiration.”

[Editors' tributes on the Guardian's 200th birthday: the full list](#)

[Read more](#)

Surviving and thriving for 200 years was “an extraordinary achievement”, said Fran Unsworth, the director of BBC News. “The Guardian’s history is a

rich tapestry of investigative journalism, holding power to account and putting their readers at the forefront of everything they do.”

Javier Moreno, the editor of El País, expressed admiration that “a daily founded in Manchester in the 19th century has become one of the most influential global voices”, adding that many of its journalists were “the stuff of legends”.

The Manchester Guardian published its first edition on [5 May 1821](#) in response to a massacre in the city of demonstrators calling for political reform that came to be known as [Peterloo](#). Since then it has published more than 54,000 editions, several million pieces of journalism, changed laws, prompted resignations and won thousands of awards, including a Pulitzer prize and, most recently, [an Oscar](#).

Christian Broughton, the managing director of the Independent, said it sometimes took a tragedy to start a movement. “The Peterloo massacre was one such incident,” he said. “While there are difficult truths to be reported, we will need journalists to do their work, and readers who recognise its value.”

[embed](#)

Wolfgang Krach, the editor of the Süddeutsche Zeitung in Munich, said the Guardian was a “model of journalistic integrity” that had successfully held on to its nonconformist ethos. “Giving voice to liberal and democratic values, it has shown how to report the world’s news ... it represents the best that Fleet Street tradition has to offer.”

The Guardian’s independence of spirit was widely recognised among journalism’s leading editors. John Witherow, of the Times in London, said [CP Scott](#), who edited the Guardian for 57 years, “would have no difficulty in recognising that, as it celebrates its bicentenary, his paper still has a soul of its own. Long may it continue.”

Roula Khalaf, the editor of the Financial Times, said the role of the media was “to hold the powerful to account and to deliver the facts to readers – the

Guardian does this and has done since its inception. Here's to many more years of hard-earned headlines and true journalism.”

The Irish Times editor, Paul O'Neill, said that in this independence “of mind, and from commercial or political masters”, the Guardian and his paper were “kindred spirits”.

Alison Phillips, the editor of the [Daily Mirror](#), noted that the two publications were often on the same side of the argument when campaigning and highlighting injustices, even if the Guardian used “more words and way longer sentences”. She added: “The importance of trusted, quality journalism which refuses to shy from the subjects which the rich and powerful would rather not discuss can never be underestimated.”

But as Dean Baquet, the executive editor of the [New York Times](#), pointed out, the Guardian has not traded on its history. “What [the Guardian] accomplished is becoming a truly great investigative paper willing to take on the most ambitious subjects – big government, big tech, the surveillance state. It forced us all to lift our game and it made us all better.”



The masthead of the first edition of the Manchester Guardian on 5 May 1821. Photograph: David McCoy/The Guardian

Channel 4's head of programmes, [Ian Katz](#), a former Guardian deputy editor, celebrated the publication's continuing capacity to cause trouble, from exposing super-rich tax avoiders to the Windrush scandal. "The measure of a paper's true independence is the range and power of the enemies it makes," he said. "The Guardian has amassed a formidable – and formidably eclectic – collection of them over 200 years."

Other editors credited the Guardian with providing inspiration and resisting the recent slide towards fake news, [churnalism](#) and conspiracy theory.

"We were inspired by its principles of holding the powerful to account and being a voice of the voiceless," said Tom Grundy, the editor of Hong Kong Free Press, adding that the crowdfunded outlet he launched in 2015 would not exist without the Guardian. "Somehow, this 200-year-old paper manages to constantly reinvent itself whilst maintaining its identity and broadening its readership."

Others praised the recent innovative efforts to build a global supporter base to underpin the Guardian's financial model. "It has found a financing system compatible with its editorial DNA," said Juan Luis Sánchez, co-founder of [elDiario.es](#). "It has changed the business to fulfil the mission, not sacrificed the mission to fulfil the business."

[Digital journalism graphic](#)

Sérgio Dávila, the editor of Folha de S Paulo, added: "It is invigorating to see an outlet of the Guardian's quality turn 200 at a moment when professional journalism is under attack, [in Brazil](#) and all around the world, and when scientific facts are treated as opinion and the factual truth as fake news by a portion of society that is growing dangerously in size."

Maurizio Molinari, the editor of La Repubblica in Italy, said the Guardian's reporting since 1821 had "helped us to be better Europeans".

Christian Jensen, the editor of Politiken in Denmark, said the Guardian was at the forefront of the fight against social injustice and the climate crisis. "This [newspaper] is where so much of the world finds inspiration when we

discuss democracies that could end up dying in the dark as democratic thinking comes under pressure and privacy is eroded.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/may/05/guardian-200-editors-around-the-world-happy-birthday>.

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2021.05.06 - Opinion

- We can't stop rising sea levels, but we still have a chance to slow them down
- The ersatz hedge: how we're debasing England's rural landscape
- That creaking sound? It's the United Kingdom starting to break apart
- I'm in awe of people who work with their hands – it's a crying shame those jobs don't pay more
- Boris shows he's as adept at pedalling a bike as he is at peddling lies

[Opinion](#)Sea level

We can't stop rising sea levels, but we still have a chance to slow them down

[Tamsin Edwards](#)

Despite pandemic-enforced isolation, scientists from around the world have produced a vital climate change forecast



An iceberg cleaves from Antarctica's Pine Island glacier in February 2020.
Photograph: Esa Handout/EPA

An iceberg cleaves from Antarctica's Pine Island glacier in February 2020.
Photograph: Esa Handout/EPA

Thu 6 May 2021 04.00 EDT

Sea levels are going to rise, no matter what. This is certain. But new research I helped produce shows how much we could limit the damage: sea level rise from the [melting of ice](#) could be halved this century if we meet the [Paris agreement](#) target of keeping global warming to 1.5C.

The aim of [our research](#) was to provide a coherent picture of the future of the world's land ice using hundreds of simulations. But now, as I look back on the two years it took us to put the study together, what stands out is the theme of connection running through it all – despite the world being more disconnected than ever.

Connecting digitally: our study brought together 84 people working at 62 institutes in 15 countries (nine in Europe, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China). I led the study but haven't met many of my co-authors. Even if we had planned to meet, over half the 120 days I spent on the study have been since the first UK lockdown.

Connecting parts of the world: the world's land ice is made up of global glaciers in 19 regions, and the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets at each pole. Our methods allow us to use exactly the same predictions of global warming for each. This may sound obvious, but is actually unusual, perhaps unique at this scale. Each part of the world is simulated separately, by different groups of people, using different climate models to provide the warming levels. We realigned all these predictions to make them consistent.

Connecting the data: at its heart, this study is a join-the-dots picture. Our 38 groups of modellers created nearly 900 simulations of [glaciers](#) and [ice sheets](#). Each one is a data point about its contribution to future sea level rise. Here, we connected the points with lines, using a statistical method called "[emulation](#)". Imagine clusters of stars in the sky: drawing the constellations allow us to visualise the full picture more easily – not just a few points of light, but each detail of Orion's torso, limbs, belt and bow.

Our process of joining the dots meant we could make a more complete prediction of the full range of possible futures – mapping out our uncertainties in the levels of the rising seas. For instance, if we reduce emissions from current pledges to meet the Paris agreement targets, which would reduce warming from more than 3C to 1.5C, the median predictions for sea level rise from melting ice reduce by half, from 25cm to 13cm, by 2100. For the upper end, there is a 95% chance the level would be less than 28cm if we limit warming to 1.5C, compared with 40cm under current

pledges.

Connecting to each other: some of the initial conversations for the study were in person. Most memorable and important among them were visiting the ice sheet project lead, Sophie Nowicki, at Nasa to analyse their data in June 2019, and long walks discussing the statistical methods with my mentor and friend Jonty Rougier in Hastings. But even when we went digital, many of us kept a personal, sometimes emotional, connection under the pressures of work and family life amid the pandemic, and with a number of people involved in the research living in California close to the [huge wildfires](#) last summer.

Connecting to the planet: we are nearly all modellers on this study, translating the world into computer code and digital numbers. But I was lucky enough to do much of this work close to the ocean, watching waves lap the shores whose future we aimed to predict. And many of my co-authors work in the cold, often punishing environments of glaciers and ice sheets. We always had in mind the real-world implications – the irreversible loss of these unique landscapes, and the impacts on those who live at the coasts.

So, for those most at risk, we made a second set of predictions in a pessimistic storyline where Antarctica is particularly sensitive to climate change. We found the losses from the ice sheet could be five times larger than the main predictions, which would imply a 5% chance of the land ice contribution to sea level exceeding 56cm in 2100 – even if we limit warming to 1.5C. Such a storyline would mean far more severe increases in flooding.

Connecting the dots: predictions like these are not just abstract sets of numbers. Not just ones and zeroes or lines on a page. They link our actions with consequences. In the runup to [COP26](#) this November, we wait to see whether nations will revise their pledges – their “nationally determined contributions”. Limiting future greenhouse emissions with more ambitious pledges – and, crucially, detailed plans to fulfil them – would help to limit the damage done by flooding to people around the world, and the costs to try to protect them.

We must connect – with each other, and with reality – to deal with

uncertainty about the future. Covid-19 has urgently highlighted the need for good communication, collaboration and coordination. We can find resilience to uncertainty in groups and networks. But at the same time, we must acknowledge inevitable certainty: sea levels are going to go up. How much, though, is still up to us.

- Dr Tamsin Edwards is a senior lecturer in physical geography at King's College London

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/06/stop-rising-sea-levels-scientists-climate-forecast>

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[Opinion](#)**Rural affairs**

The ersatz hedge: how we're debasing England's rural landscape

[Richard Mabey](#)

Spindly rows of plastic-wrapped trees represent a misguided urge to control nature and risk polluting our countryside



‘The earliest hedges, as boundary markers or stock-proof barriers, were often strips of woodland retained during agricultural deforestation.’ Hampshire, England. Photograph: robertharding/Alamy Stock Photo

‘The earliest hedges, as boundary markers or stock-proof barriers, were often strips of woodland retained during agricultural deforestation.’ Hampshire, England. Photograph: robertharding/Alamy Stock Photo

Thu 6 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Remember the English hedge? That meandering, bushy-bottomed muddle of blossom and blackberries, honeysuckle and wild rose, singing warblers and

gothic trees half-buried in the greenery? More than 150,000 miles were grubbed out by farmers between the end of the second world war and the 1970s to make room for their big machines.

What have been called the countryside's "locust years" ended, mercifully, and in the 80s there were a few halfhearted attempts at planting new, mixed hedges. But over the past decade, and especially the last two years, a new threat has emerged. Not destruction this time but debasement. We've entered the era of the ersatz hedge, a hybrid of plastic and bush that is being planted across lowland [England](#), especially in arable areas, and which is managed as ruthlessly as a suburban privet border.

I'm sure they are being planted with the best of intentions, to restore the lost miles and contribute to carbon capture. But that is not how these new growths behave. They're easy to spot: flimsy, single lines of hawthorn slips encased in plastic, either wrapped tightly round like clingfilm, or in short, opaque tubes. I know places where they've become the most obtrusive feature in the landscape, the lines of pallid verticals stretching across the fields like some ghastly ceremonial graveyard.

[Cornish hedges under threat from developers, say conservationists](#)
[Read more](#)

In East Anglia where I live, the *reductio ad absurdum* is the Norwich northern bypass, where 10 miles of field-edge and verge have been planted up with lurid lime-green tubes. It's rural Norfolk's biggest eyesore, and if this quantity of single-use plastic had been fly-tipped by the side of a road it would be prosecutable.

The guards are rarely removed, so a few years on the hawthorns, with all their lower growth suppressed, look like characterless green lollipops, smaller versions of what the great woodland ecologist [Oliver Rackham](#) derided as "gateposts with leaves". The practice of "[plashing](#)" hedges (basically bending and layering vertical shoots to thicken up the lower growth) is more or less extinct, so now the hedges are flailed to smithereens once a year, often so severely that they don't blossom. The end result is typically a leggy artefact about a metre tall and half a metre deep, mulched by a detritus of degrading plastic. It's a monoculture, of minimal value for

wildlife and for carbon sequestration too, since so little woody growth is allowed to accumulate.

So how did this new model hedge take over? The earliest hedges, as boundary markers or stock-proof barriers, were often strips of woodland retained during agricultural deforestation – “woodland ghosts”. They were rich in shrubs and finicky ground flora like wood anemone. Planting saplings was a late development, and for much of the medieval period hedges were grown from seed. A favourite method was to twist acorns, sloes, ash-keys and holly berries in a thick rope and then bury it in a shallow trench – no need for any sort of guard as the thorny species protected the rest. New tree and shrub species arrived of their own accord, their seed blown in by the wind or dropped by birds, and bound into the hedge by sensitive management. As a rule of thumb, one new species arrived per 30-metre stretch every 100 years. About 50 different species of native shrub and tree occur regularly in old hedges, including [aspen](#), [wild cherry](#), [sweet briar](#) and [wayfaring tree](#). There are many surviving hedges in England that date to long before the Norman conquest – contrary to what we were taught at school, that hedges were “invented” during the [enclosure acts](#), just 200 years ago.

The straight [quickthorn](#) rows of that era were created as bureaucratic and territorial fences, and it’s hard to understand why modern hedges should ape their style. Why single rows, and of just one species? Why, above all, the disfiguring plastic guards? The conventional explanation is that young trees need protection from wind, frost and browsing animals, particularly some fantasised army of super-rabbits. The idea that our native tree and shrub species, evolved on an offshore Atlantic island with a highly variable climate, are in mortal danger from their environment, seems like something from the age of “here be dragons”. There is plenty of scientific evidence to the contrary: that, for instance, young saplings root more sturdily when they are exposed to wind; and that the only real browsing threat is from sheep and deer – which of course are indifferent to guards that come up no higher than their thighs. But the real evidence for the irrelevance of tree guards is the overwhelming weight of history: all those ancient hedges that have sprouted and thrived, unguarded, for millennia; every patch of heath and downland, that, to their conservation manager’s sighs, bristles spontaneously and ceaselessly with young trees.

I suspect what is really being protected here is not young plants, but our ingrained commitment to retaining control over nature and our arrogant belief that it cannot survive without our intensive paternal care. The debris from these plastic security blankets will be with us for decades. But the minimalist hedges they currently constrict can be overplanted with multiple species of free-growing native shrubs and forest trees. Then the new hedges will find their 21st-century meanings, not as virtuous gestures or bleak barriers but as corridors linking wildlife-rich areas, highways for birds and insects, and the visual delight they once were.

- Richard Mabey is a writer and broadcaster

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[OpinionPolitics](#)

That creaking sound? It's the United Kingdom starting to break apart

[George Monbiot](#)



Westminster's self-serving rule is bolstering the cause of independence across the union. Democracy will be the winner



Illustration: Sébastien Thibault/The Guardian

Illustration: Sébastien Thibault/The Guardian

Wed 5 May 2021 09.20 EDT

Any residual argument for Scotland to stay within the United Kingdom meets its counter-argument in Boris Johnson. Westminster politics has always been the preserve of a remote enclave, on average massively richer and more privileged than those they claim to represent, especially in Scotland, Wales and [Northern Ireland](#). But now that they're dominated by a prehensile ogre grabbing all that his donors will give him while queues at the foodbanks lengthen, why should anyone north of the border consent to be ruled by his insouciant decree?

We have never been closer and never further away. Remote technologies open up our living rooms to each other, but what we see behind the doors are different worlds: flaking plaster in one, [£800-a-roll](#) wallpaper in another. In Westminster, a hereditary elite treated the pandemic less as a crisis than as an opportunity to [enrich its friends](#). By granting unadvertised, untendered contracts to favoured companies for essential goods and services, many of which were either substandard or never arrived, it actively encouraged the [sort of profiteering](#) during a national emergency portrayed in *The Third Man*. A number of Harry Limes have become exceedingly rich as a result.

In Westminster, where the emblem of parliament is a portcullis surmounted by a crown and surrounded by chains (translation: keep out, plebs), the powers symbolically vested in the crown are routinely abused by prime ministers. But none, in the modern era, has exploited the absence of a codified constitution as effectively as Johnson. Now he can choose whether or not his own [failures and excesses](#) should be investigated. He has stuffed the House of Lords with a [bizarre assortment](#) of cronies and creeps who owe everything to his patronage and nothing to the electorate.

Though he anointed himself [“minister for the union”](#) and claimed that [“wild horses”](#) would not prevent him from visiting Scotland before tomorrow’s elections, last month he [dropped his plans](#) to do so. He has labelled devolution a “disaster” and [“Tony Blair’s biggest mistake”](#). His Internal Market Act wrenches back [devolved powers](#) from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. He has launched a challenge before the supreme court to two [Holyrood bills](#) (on children’s rights and local government) designed to enhance the welfare of the Scottish people. He intervenes only to suppress.

Keir Starmer seems scarcely interested in Scotland as anything other than an electoral calculation – and it’s not always clear which election he’s considering. Last month he made the weirdest [campaign video](#) I’ve ever seen in the UK. It began with a British Airways jet landing at Edinburgh airport. Starmer came down the steps like a visiting dignitary, mumbling “Remind me which country this is again?”, strode around the empty airport with a phalanx of sinister-looking men, inveighed against the lack of flights and announced that he wanted to put economic recovery “above all else”, presumably including life on Earth. Then, it seems, having alienated his remaining Scottish voters and anyone under 40, he flew out again.

It was incomprehensible, until you remember that British Airways is a touchstone and crucial battleground for the United Union, Labour’s [biggest donor](#), and that future remissions depend on the outcome of its leadership elections, for which nominations begin tomorrow, just as [Scottish voters](#) go to the polls. In other words, he seems to have been using Scotland as a backdrop for an entirely different contest. That’s what Scotland is to Westminster: a backdrop.

I have long struggled to understand the [liberal enthusiasm](#) for the UK. To me, it looks like a mechanism for frustrating progressive change and crushing political aspiration. The number of people in the three devolved nations who are reaching the same conclusion is rising at astonishing speed.

In Scotland, the three parties that favour independence (the SNP, the Greens and Alba) are on course between them to [win a clear majority](#) this week. If Westminster permits a second referendum, and allows it to be conducted fairly, the likely result is the end of the union.

Until a few years ago, Welsh independence looked like an eccentric hobby; those in favour tended to peak at about 10%. But a poll in March showed that, of those who expressed an opinion, [39% of Welsh people](#) said they would vote to leave the union. Plaid Cymru and perhaps the Greens, both of which favour independence, should make some gains tomorrow.

Northern Ireland's centenary this week is almost certain to be its last. Reunification is likely to happen slowly: it [could be disastrous](#) if rushed. But, prompted by the chaos of Brexit and a customs border in the Irish Sea, it has begun to look inexorable. A poll last week showed that a [small majority](#) of those with an opinion in Northern Ireland believe reunification will happen in their lifetimes. That creaking sound? It's the ship of state starting to break apart.

The slow collapse of the United Kingdom creates an opportunity in all three nations to do things differently. An independent Scotland and Wales could cast aside the culture of corruption enabled – perhaps necessitated – by the UK's outrageous [campaign finance](#) rules. They could reclaim their politics from Westminster's gross [subversions of democracy](#), its royal powers and the pompous rituals designed both to glorify and to conceal them. They could – and there are plenty of people in both nations with this ambition – create 21st-century governments built on proportional general elections, participatory democracy and continuous [policy adjustment](#), distributive economies and an ethos of public service.

The reunification of Ireland would necessitate the political renewal of both parts of the island. It would create a new nation, built on new [constitutional](#)

[principles](#). It would require a massive exercise in participation, recognition and reconciliation. We could all do with some of that.

So what about [England](#)? At first sight the collapse of the UK leaves progressives here with a problem: a giant Tory majority coupled with all the old dysfunctions, untempered by the demands of the other nations. But this is our problem, and we should face it without recourse to the princes over the border.

I don't believe England will address its manifold corruptions while our leaders can carry on like colonial viceroys, governing the four nations with ever decreasing consent. As the former nations of the UK embrace meaningful democracy, our preposterous, antiquated system will become ever harder to justify. It seems to me that political regeneration is impossible without the breakup of the union. We will begin to be good only when we stop trying to be great.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#) **Work & careers**

I'm in awe of people who work with their hands – it's a crying shame those jobs don't pay more

[Adrian Chiles](#)



Whether it's putting up scaffolding or playing with Lego, I have no manual skills whatsoever



‘I am left slack-jawed by sparks, chippies and builders of all shapes and sizes.’ Photograph: Tempura/Getty Images

‘I am left slack-jawed by sparks, chippies and builders of all shapes and sizes.’ Photograph: Tempura/Getty Images

Thu 6 May 2021 03.00 EDT

There are jobs that use the head, those that need a heart and those for which you have to use your hands. The trouble is that you will normally be far more amply rewarded for one than for the other two put together. Jobs using your head will usually bring home more bacon than those using your heart or hands. The relative pay packets of most people working with their hands must have been shrinking since the iron age.

Apart, possibly, from cooking, I’m not blessed with “hand” skills. I was crap at Lego and never moved on from that. I tell a lie. I had a go at being a scaffolder when I left school, and was hopeless at that, too, which could have had far graver consequences for myself and others than playing Lego. So, I’m not blowing my own trumpet when I say it’s a crying shame that most jobs using hands don’t pay more. It seems so unfair. I looked on, slack-jawed in admiration, the other day as a plumber took apart my oil-fired boiler, reassembled it and, lo, there was heat. It’s the same with sparks, chippies and builders of all shapes and sizes. I observe them at work

knowing you could leave me with the same materials and the best tools until the end of time, and I would contrive to create nothing of any use or value.

I suppose someone will tell me that the pay is all about supply and demand and whatnot. But something's not right. I'd feel more comfortable with the world if there was any correlation at all between the money people make and how much I admire the kind of work they do. And to those of you who might, politely or impolitely, ask what I've done to deserve whatever money I've made, I'd say you may have a point.

There's all kinds of head work, and all kinds of heart and hand work, but I'm not being patronising or insincere when I say that when I meet, say, a nurse or social worker, or a carpenter, I'm far, far more in awe of their talents than when I meet someone in finance. "How did you make that furniture?" is always going to be a more interesting question to me than "How did you move that money about?"

For all these reasons I loved it when the winner of the Oscar for best director, Chloé Zhao, thanked all the "hearts and hands" that came together to make *Nomadland*. But I expect it was the "heads" who made all the money.

Adrian Chiles is a Guardian columnist

The politics sketchBoris Johnson

Boris shows he's as adept at pedalling a bike as he is at peddling lies

John Crace

Prime minister hits the local election campaign trail, where he's more than happy to take voters for a ride



Boris Johnson waves as he rides a bike ride along the towpath of the Stourbridge canal in the West Midlands. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

Boris Johnson waves as he rides a bike ride along the towpath of the Stourbridge canal in the West Midlands. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

Wed 5 May 2021 12.14 EDT

Life was sweet for Boris Johnson on the last day of the local elections campaign. He'd yet again wriggled out of doing any broadcast interviews – he'd sent out Nadhim Zahawi, his latest fall guy, for the second time inside a week to take the hit on any stray questions about £840-a-roll wallpaper –

and the morning found him going for a gentle bike ride along the canal with the [West Midlands mayor, Andy Street](#).

True, the conversation hadn't got off to the best of starts with Andy pointing out that he had [once been boss of John Lewis](#) and what the hell was wrong with John Lewis furniture? But Boris had soon won him over by blaming Carrie for the Downing Street décor and that he'd have been quite happy with John Lewis furniture. Hell, he'd had to sleep on a John Lewis sofa often enough in the past when kicked out of the bedroom after yet another affair had been rumbled.

Besides, neither he nor Andy had wanted to spoil their morning out together, when all the polls indicated that Street was going to be comfortably re-elected as mayor the following day. And Andy had positively glowed with pride when Boris had done a pool clip for the TV broadcasters in which he had lavished the mayor with praise.

"I think Andy Street has done an absolutely outstanding job," he had said. "I think he would do a much better job than the other candidates. I've been working with him for years now – he's brilliant at getting funding for projects here in the West Midlands, but he also has a vision for the whole area." It wasn't true of course. Boris had only been working – if you could call a couple of phone calls working – with him for about 18 months at most and Andy had won the mayoralty back in 2017 – as had Ben Houchen in Teesside – when Theresa May had been prime minister. But right now it suited them both to act as if they were old friends.

Boris warmed to his theme. It would be a miracle if the Tories were to win the Hartlepool byelection, he added. Another lie. The latest opinion polls showed that the Conservative candidate was 17 points ahead: so it would be a [miracle if Labour weren't annihilated](#). That would be something to gloat about on Friday. No one even seemed to be that bothered that he couldn't explain who had paid the initial invoice for the [Downing Street refurb](#). Or that he had reportedly tried to get a Tory sponsor to [cover the cost of his childcare](#). Made it, Ma! Top of the world.

Best of all was the news from London. [Shaun Bailey was on course for oblivion](#). There had been a reason he had installed someone as hopeless as

Shaun as the Tory candidate for London mayor. And that was because Boris was desperate for him to lose. He didn't want another Conservative becoming London mayor as that would diminish his achievement in being the only Tory capable of winning London. Though that had been in his liberal, anti-Brexit, pole dancing with Jennifer Arcuri days. Happy times. Still, onwards and control+alt+delete. Just as long as he remembered to cast his vote for Sadiq Khan the following day.

00:33

Keir Starmer says Labour recovery will 'take longer' before local elections – video

Elsewhere in the country, Keir Starmer was living his worst life. He had tried to sound enthusiastic for [Liam Byrne, Labour's candidate standing against Andy Street](#), but his heart wasn't really in it. Just as he had tried to be positive about Labour's chances in Hartlepool. But the reality was he had always known he was screwed in the byelection. Almost all of those who had supported the Brexit party in the 2019 general election would be voting Tory this time round.

[Keir Starmer must lean right to win? History suggests otherwise | Michael Jacobs and Andrew Hindmoor](#)
[Read more](#)

What Keir longed to say was that the changing Brexit demographics – coupled with a vaccine bounce – made these elections a nightmare. One not of his making. Nobody could realistically have expected him to do much better, but he was going to have to take responsibility for whatever happened. And now he would be under attack from two sides: the triumphant Tories and the [Labour](#) left who had never forgiven him for moving the party to the centre ground. The next few days were going to be grim with only humble pie to eat. The fact was that the country was changing. Soon it might even be easier to win some Tory seats in the south of the country than hang on to [Labour](#) ones in the north.

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- [Utah Woman missing for five months found alive in tent in a canyon](#)

[European Union](#)

Brussels and London settle row over status of EU ambassador to UK

British government grants full diplomatic status after months of refusing to accede to EU demands



The UK has now agreed to give João Vale de Almeida full diplomatic status.
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

The UK has now agreed to give João Vale de Almeida full diplomatic status.
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[*Daniel Boffey*](#) in Brussels

Wed 5 May 2021 14.31 EDT

A row over the status of the EU's ambassador to the UK has been settled, with the British government granting full diplomatic status after months of refusing to accede to Brussels' demands.

In a joint statement, the UK foreign Secretary, [Dominic Raab](#), and EU's high representative for foreign affairs, Josep Borrell, a former Spanish minister, said agreement had been struck in the margins of a G7 summit.

“We are pleased to have reached an agreement together, based on goodwill and pragmatism, on an establishment agreement for the EU delegation to the UK,” they said. “The EU ambassador will have a status consistent with heads of missions of states.”

The compromise struck will mean, however, that some of the 25 staff working under the ambassador will not have immunity from criminal charges.

The two men said: “EU Delegation staff will have the privileges and immunities needed to function effectively, while allowing for effective administration of justice, and we look forward to moving ahead and tackling global challenges together.”

Raab is understood to have been exercised about the need to limit the number of people with immunity in light of the death of Harry Dunn in August 2019 who was killed by Anne Sacoolas, a US diplomat who was allowed to leave the country due to her diplomatic exemption from prosecution.

The UK had [declined to give](#) João Vale de Almeida, who arrived last year in London to represent the EU, full diplomatic status on the basis that he does not represent a country. He was instead given diplomatic recognition, which is one rung below.

The British government's approach has stirred anger in Brussels as the EU has 143 delegations around the world, each of which has full diplomatic status.

In January, Borrell had expressed the displeasure of the 27 member states at the snub. “It's not a friendly signal,” he said, “the first one that the United Kingdom has sent to us immediately after leaving the [European Union](#). If things continue like this there are no good prospects.”

As a result of the dispute, the UK's head of mission to the EU, Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby, had not been accorded the usual diplomatic access he could have expected from his position, a cause of some difficulty in recent weeks as a range of EU-UK crises have hit. Sources on both sides had been largely embarrassed by the saga. EU sources said they would now swiftly arrange for Croisdale-Appleby to present his credentials to European council president Charles Michel in order to normalise diplomatic relations.

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Italy

American students jailed for life for murder of police officer in Rome

Jury convicts Finnegan Lee Elder, 21, and Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, 20, over knife killing committed in 2019



Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, behind bars, talks to his uncle Claudio Natale before the jury began deliberating. Photograph: Gregorio Borgia/AP

Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, behind bars, talks to his uncle Claudio Natale before the jury began deliberating. Photograph: Gregorio Borgia/AP

[Angela Giuffrida](#) in Rome

Wed 5 May 2021 18.25 EDT

Two American students have been sentenced to life in prison by a Rome court for the murder of Italian police officer Mario Cerciello Rega.

After almost 13 hours of deliberation, a jury convicted Finnegan Lee Elder, 21, and Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, 20, of murdering Cerciello Rega, who had only just returned to duty after his honeymoon when he was stabbed to death, aged 35, on a street in central Rome in July 2019.

A state funeral was held for the officer, who prosecutor Maria Sabina Calabretta said was killed in a “disproportionate and deadly attack”.

Elder looked stunned when the verdict was read out on Wednesday night.

During a brief court appearance earlier on Wednesday, Elder told his lawyer “I’m stressed” before kissing a crucifix he wears on a neck chain and pointing it towards the sky. Elder’s parents were in court, as was Natale-Hjorth’s uncle.

Cerciello Rega’s widow, Rosa Maria Esilio, broke down in tears in court after hearing the verdict.

“Notwithstanding the fact that there is a dead man who deserves all the pity, the fact that two people are going to prison is not a reason for anyone to rejoice,” Franco Coppi, Esilio’s lawyer, told Rai news. “They are human beings who, although deserve punishment, also suffer.”



Finnegan Lee Elder appeared stunned by the verdict.

Natale-Hjorth was visiting Italian relatives near Rome when he met up with Elder, a former schoolfriend from San Francisco who was travelling through [Europe](#), on 26 July 2019.

Cerciello Rega [was stabbed 11 times](#) and his colleague, Andrea Varriale, was injured after the officers, both in plainclothes and without their service pistols, confronted Elder and Natale-Hjorth in the Prati district of Rome while investigating a bag snatch.

Elder, who had travelled to [Italy](#) with an 18cm (7in) combat knife in his suitcase, and Natale-Hjorth said they mistook the officers for criminals out to get them and had acted in self-defence.

Earlier in the evening, the students had contacted a middleman to buy cocaine in Trastevere, a popular nightlife area.

The middleman took them to a drug dealer, who charged them €80 (£70) for “cocaine” that was, in fact, aspirin.

In retaliation, they took the middleman’s bag, containing his mobile phone, and fled before allegedly demanding a cash ransom and cocaine to return the bag.

The middleman arranged to meet the pair in the Prati district. He had also contacted the police to report the theft, and the two officers went to the site.

The students fled the scene and the next day were traced to a hotel, where police found the knife used to kill Cerciello Rega.

Elder admitted repeatedly stabbing Cerciello Rega, but said he and Natale-Hjorth were suddenly confronted by the men, who they thought were drug dealers.

Calabretta called for the pair to be given life sentences. “Life imprisonment is not a trophy to be exhibited but a just penalty ... in the face of such tragic facts, nobody wins and nobody loses,” she said in her rebuttal to defence arguments in late April.

Calabretta dismissed defence arguments that Elder's constant fear of attack, the result of a history of psychiatric problems, had led him to kill Cerciello Rega after mistaking him and Varriale for criminals.

Varriale testified that the two officers approached the young men on the street from the front and showed their badges, although Cerciello Rega's was never found.

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Space

Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin plans space sightseeing jaunt for July

New Shepard rocket-and-capsule combo aims to fly six passengers 62 miles above Earth into space



A participant leaves the Blue Origin space simulator in Las Vegas, Nevada.
Photograph: Mark Ralston/AFP/Getty

A participant leaves the Blue Origin space simulator in Las Vegas, Nevada.
Photograph: Mark Ralston/AFP/Getty

Reuters in Seattle

Thu 6 May 2021 04.43 EDT

Blue Origin, Jeff Bezos's rocket company, aims to launch its first suborbital sightseeing trip on its New Shepard spacecraft on 20 July, a moment that could usher in an era of private commercial space travel.

Blue Origin also said it would offer one seat on the first flight to the winning bidder of a five-week online auction, the proceeds of which will be donated to the space firm's foundation.

The [New Shepard rocket-and-capsule combo](#) is designed to autonomously fly six passengers more than 62 miles (100km) above Earth into suborbital space, high enough to experience a few minutes of weightlessness and see the curvature of the planet before the pressurised capsule returns to Earth under parachutes.

The capsule features six observation windows, which, according to Blue Origin, are nearly three times as tall as those on a Boeing 747 jetliner and the largest ever used in space.

“The view will be spectacular,” said Ariane Cornell, Blue Origin's director of astronaut sales.

After its first flight, Cornell said Blue Origin would have “a couple more” crewed flights before the end of the year. She declined to disclose details of the ticket price, which has been a closely guarded secret for years.

Reuters reported in 2018 that Blue Origin was planning to charge passengers at least \$200,000 for the ride, based on an appraisal of rival plans from Richard Branson's [Virgin Galactic](#) and other considerations, although the company's strategy may have changed.

[Falling Chinese rocket to crash to Earth on weekend as US calls for 'responsible space behaviours'](#)

[Read more](#)

Wednesday's announcement follows years of testing and development work that has included delays.

Cornell said Blue Origin would love to increase the frequency of its tourist space flights and add launch locations, possibly outside the US, depending on demand. For July's flight, the reusable New Shepard booster will launch and land in west Texas.

Celebrities and the uber-rich appear to be the core market for space tourist jaunts, at least initially. Cornell told reporters the most likely candidates would be “very clear on our radar”.

Only 569 people have ever been into space, she said, adding “we’re about to change that dramatically”. But she declined to say when – or if – Bezos, a lifelong space enthusiast and currently the world’s richest person, will take a trip on New Shepard.

[Virgin Galactic also aims to fly private customers](#) in early 2022, after a first flight with Branson onboard later this year. Its zero-gravity experience is anchored by its [SpaceShipTwo plane](#), and the company has plans to offer point-to-point travel between far-flung cities at near-space altitudes.

Virgin says it will charge more than \$250,000 for new reservations but has not announced final pricing. Sales will reopen after Branson’s flight.

08:38

Why hasn't space tourism taken off? – video

Meanwhile, a college science professor and an aerospace data analyst are among a four-member crew for a launch into orbit planned later this year by Elon Musk’s [SpaceX](#), part of a charity drive billed as the first all-civilian spaceflight in history.

Blue Origin has fallen far behind [SpaceX](#) on orbital transportation, and lost out to [SpaceX](#) and United Launch Alliance on billions of dollars’ worth of US national security launch contracts that begin in 2022.

But Blue Origin’s space tourism announcement provides the Amazon founder with momentum while it protests SpaceX’s \$2.9bn contract under Nasa’s high-profile programme to return Americans to the moon in coming years.

Regulatory filings revealed Bezos sold Amazon shares worth about \$2bn this week as a part of an arranged trading plan. Bezos, who will [step down](#) as Amazon chief executive in a few months, has been unloading shares of

the company he founded and has also said he would sell shares worth \$1bn to fund Blue Origin projects.

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Women's rights and gender equality

Global shortfall of nearly 1m midwives due to failure to value role, study finds

Investing in midwifery could prevent two-thirds of maternal and newborn deaths, but investment and training are urgently needed



Midwifery students in Masuba, central Sierra Leone. Roles caring for women and newborns are often seen as ‘women’s work’. Photograph: Marco Longari/AFP/Getty

Midwifery students in Masuba, central Sierra Leone. Roles caring for women and newborns are often seen as ‘women’s work’. Photograph: Marco Longari/AFP/Getty

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Thu 6 May 2021 02.15 EDT

The world is facing a shortage of 900,000 midwives, with more than half the shortfall in Africa, where nearly [two-thirds](#) of maternal deaths occur, according to a new survey.

Insufficient resources and a failure to recognise the importance of the role mean there has been little progress since the last study in 2014, according to the [State of the World's Midwifery](#) report, which looked at 194 countries.

There are an estimated 1.9 million midwives and associate midwives [working globally](#), 90% of them women. The report, published by the World Health Organization, the International Confederation of Midwives and the UN population fund (UNFPA) on Wednesday, said little progress had been made to improve midwifery care in the past seven years and the Covid pandemic had exacerbated the shortage with midwives deployed to support other health services.

It called for greater investment in education and training, and urged governments to make support for midwifery a priority.

Midwifery, and roles caring for women and newborns, it said, were often undervalued, “leading to midwives having no voice and no place at the leadership table: this hinders respect, access to decent work and pay equity”.

In 2017, an estimated 196,000 women in sub-Saharan Africa died during pregnancy or childbirth compared with 740 in Europe. [Research](#) published in the Lancet last year found that investing in midwifery could prevent roughly two-thirds of maternal and newborn deaths and stillbirths.

[‘Calamity of maternal deaths’: Covid concern grows for Brazil’s pregnant](#)
[Read more](#)

Anneka Knutsson, chief of UNFPA’s reproductive health branch, said that, at the current pace of progress in making up the shortfall in midwife numbers, “we would end up with a gap that is still 750,000 by 2030, which is little improvement”.

She said: “Africa would be exactly the same, that’s the projection. [The progress] won’t keep pace with the fertility rate and unmet need in [Africa](#). The improvement we see would happen in middle-income countries.”

Knutsson said trained and resourced midwives would be able to deliver about 90% of essential sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

Midwifery, in particular, is seen as “women’s work”, which often confuses and undervalues midwives’ economic and professional contributions to society

Dr Franka Cadée, president of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), said: “As autonomous, primary-care providers, midwives are continually overlooked and ignored. It’s time for governments to acknowledge the evidence surrounding the life-promoting, life-saving impact of midwife-led care, and take action.

“ICM is committed to leveraging the strength of our global midwife community to carry forward these powerful findings and inspire country-level change. However, this work is not possible without commitment from decision-makers and those with the resources to invest in midwives and the quality care they provide to birthing women.”

The report’s recommendations will be discussed at the [World Health Assembly](#) later this month.

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Utah

Utah woman missing for five months found alive in tent in a canyon

- Woman, 47, reportedly survived winter on grass, moss and water
- Authorities found her during aerial search of canyon



Diamond Fork Canyon in Utah, near to where an abandoned car was found in a trailhead parking lot in November. Photograph: Isaac Hale/AP

Diamond Fork Canyon in Utah, near to where an abandoned car was found in a trailhead parking lot in November. Photograph: Isaac Hale/AP

Guardian staff and agencies

Wed 5 May 2021 13.25 EDT

A [Utah](#) woman who disappeared in November was discovered alive in a tent at a campsite, having reportedly subsisted off of grass, moss and water from a nearby river for more than five months.

The 47-year-old woman, who authorities did not identify, was first reported missing after US Forest Service employees preparing for seasonal canyon closures found her car abandoned in a trailhead parking lot about 50 miles (80km) south-east of Salt Lake City on 25 November.

[Facebook fudge potentially lets Trump live to lie another day](#)

[Read more](#)

Detectives and search and rescue officials searched the area in the following weeks, but could not locate her.

According to Sgt Spencer Cannon of the Utah county sheriff's office, authorities found her on Sunday during an aerial search of the area, which they conducted alongside volunteers in hopes of finding evidence she was still alive.

While looking for a drone that crashed during the search, the sergeant and drone pilot came upon a tent, which the woman unzipped as they approached.

"We now believe she knowingly chose to remain in the area over the months since November 2020," the sheriff's office said in a [statement](#). "She did have a small amount of food with her, and she told SAR officials she foraged for grass and moss to subsist. She also had access to an ample supply of water in a nearby river.

Cannon, the Utah county sheriff, said the woman had no physical injuries besides being weak and underweight. "Regardless of the fact that she was able to survive, it was a tough existence for those months that she was up there and we're glad we were able to make contact with her," Cannon [told](#) local station KSL-TV.

After the discovery, officials took the woman to the hospital for evaluation. The investigation into her disappearance revealed she may have struggled with mental health challenges, according to the [statement](#).

"We want to be clear that while many people might choose to not live in the circumstances and conditions this woman did, she did nothing against the

law,” the statement added. “And in the future she might choose to return to the same area. Resources were made available to her should she decide to use them.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/05/utah-woman-missing-five-months-found-campsite-tent>

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- [Exclusive Noel Clarke accused of sexual harassment on Doctor Who set](#)
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[Noel Clarke](#)

Noel Clarke accused of sexual harassment on Doctor Who set

Exclusive: BBC faces questions as further allegations made about Clarke – and co-star John Barrowman is accused of exposing himself



The British actor Noel Clarke at the Bafta awards ceremony in London, February 2017. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

The British actor Noel Clarke at the Bafta awards ceremony in London, February 2017. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

[Sirin Kale](#) and [Lucy Osborne](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 05.00 EDT

The [Noel Clarke](#) sexual harassment controversy threatens to embroil the BBC after several sources came forward to allege they were sexually harassed or inappropriately touched by the actor on a flagship show, Doctor Who.

Another [Doctor Who](#) actor, John Barrowman, has also been accused of repeatedly exposing himself to co-workers on two BBC productions, prompting questions about whether the corporation allowed a lax culture on its sets during the mid-2000s.

The developments come a week after ITV, Sky and the BBC announced that they had cut ties with Clarke after the Guardian [published testimony](#) from 20 women who variously accused him of groping, sexual harassment and bullying.

Clarke, who vehemently denies any allegations of sexual misconduct, criminal wrongdoing or sexually inappropriate behaviour, including the latest accusations, was also stripped of a Bafta award he was [given earlier this month](#).

Clarke's new accusers allege sexual harassment on the set of Doctor Who or at a promotional event for the show. He played the vehicle technician Mickey Smith from 2005 to 2010 in Doctor Who, gaining household fame.



Noel Clarke (second left) and John Barrowman (front row, kneeling) in a publicity show for Doctor Who in 2008. Photograph: Collection Christophel/Alamy

Barrowman, who played the character of Capt Jack Harkness in Doctor Who and its spin-off show Torchwood, is accused of exposing himself repeatedly on both sets, although numerous witnesses described the incidents as inappropriate pranks rather than anything amounting to sexually predatory behaviour.

Contacted by the Guardian, Barrowman admitted to “tomfoolery” that he now understood upset colleagues, but stressed it was never intended or interpreted as sexual in nature.

The new allegations against the actors will intensify the ongoing debate in the British film and TV industry about the treatment of women and the behaviour of men on sets.

On Thursday, more than 900 members of the British entertainment industry, including the presenter Dermot O’Leary, the actor Jim Sturgess, and the former Channel 4 commissioner Kelly Webb-Lamb, signed an open letter calling for “an end to this culture that turns a blind eye to predators and harassers operating in plain sight”.

The [BBC](#) said it would investigate any new allegations and urged witnesses to get in touch with the corporation about incidents on the set of Doctor Who, saying it stood “against all forms of inappropriate behaviour and we’re shocked to hear of these allegations”.

‘I like girls with long hair – it gives me something to hold on to’

Joanne Hayes was a costume assistant on series 1 of the revived Doctor Who, shot in 2004. She alleges that Clarke sexually harassed her in his trailer in August 2004 after she assisted him with his costume.

After a brief work-related conversation, she said, Clarke told her that he “liked girls with long hair, as it gave him something to hold on to when doing them from behind”. Hayes, who had very long hair that came to her mid-back, said she made to leave the trailer because she felt uncomfortable.

At this point, she alleges, Clarke repeated the comment, sucked his teeth, exhaled heavily, and laughed. Clarke's lawyers said he strongly denies the allegation and said the incident described did not take place.

Hayes said she did not report the incident to her bosses because "at that time, the culture was very different". However, she said the experience left her feeling "uneasy near him", and she avoided him as best she could.

Another woman, Jenna (not her real name), was a runner and driver on the early seasons of the revived Doctor Who, shot in the mid-2000s. As part of her role, she was required to drive Clarke to and from set. During these car journeys, she alleges, Clarke touched her inappropriately. She said he would touch her hand when it was on the gear stick, and grabbed her leg when she was driving.

"Constantly the conversation was about sex," Jenna said, adding that Clarke repeatedly asked her to go to his hotel room for sex, asked her sexually inappropriate questions and made sexually explicit and graphic remarks to her. She said she complained to an assistant director on the BBC show, and as a result was put on different duties.

She recalled telling the assistant director: "I can't drive him any more ... I don't want to be on my own with him." She said she did not know whether senior executives were at the time also aware of Clarke's conduct.

After Clarke realised that Jenna was no longer his driver, she alleges, he turned nasty, telling her "you think you're better than people" and becoming obstructive and difficult. A fellow crew member who witnessed Clarke's behaviour towards Jenna described it as "bullying".

Clarke strongly denied the allegations. His lawyers said any suggestion that he would be allowed to behave that way because of his perceived power was "entirely implausible" because he was near the start of his career.



Noel Clarke, Elisabeth Sladen, Billie Piper and David Tennant in season 2 of Doctor Who, 2006. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

They said if Jenna had reported such behaviour to an assistant director at the BBC, Clarke would have been spoken to or reprimanded. They said Clarke was not aware of any complaint in relation to his alleged behaviour being made against him at any time. They added it “beggars belief” that the corporation would have allowed Clarke to behave in the way that is alleged.

Monica (not her real name), another former runner on Doctor Who, alleges Clarke sexually harassed her and another female coworker in a bar at the Holland House Hotel in the mid-2000s in Cardiff, following a work event. When the women rejected Clarke’s advances, she alleges, he became “rude” and “aggressive”. The following day, she said Clarke spread false rumours about both women on set.

Clarke strongly denied the allegation. His lawyers said there would have been no real need or purpose for him to be in the hotel bar because he does not drink.

A Doctor Who actor, who asked to remain anonymous, has told the Guardian she was also sexually harassed by Clarke in the early seasons of the show. “He made advances on me,” she said, “regularly asking me if I

wanted a ‘piece of his dark chocolate’.” When she rejected his advances, the actor said, Clarke badmouthed her to people in the industry.

Clarke denied this allegation. His lawyer said this and other accusations, which they said were vague, unsupported by any objective evidence, lacking in specificity or coming from anonymised sources, made it difficult for him to provide a response. They said he has never sought to coerce, encourage or pressurise any individual into non-consensual sexual activities and strongly rejects any suggestion he has been sexually inappropriate.

‘Barrowman would just have his willy out, standing in the doorway’

In a recently resurfaced video filmed at Chicago Tardis, [a 2014 American sci-fi convention](#), Clarke talked about how his fellow Doctor Who star Barrowman would often expose his penis and “slap” it on colleagues.

Noel Clarke talks about John Barrowman at a 2014 sci-fi convention in Chicago.

The video went viral this week in the wake of the Clarke allegations. “Barrowman was there taking his dick out every five seconds,” Clarke says in the clip. Turning to his Doctor Who co-star Camille Coduri, he asks: “Do you remember that time he put it on your shoulder in the makeup truck?” She responds: “Yes, I do.”

To laughter from the audience, Clarke then does a theatrical impression of Barrowman, using a microphone as a prop for his penis, thumping it against Coduri and their fellow co-star Annette Badland. Clarke’s lawyers described the incident as “a mere snippet of a much longer, good-humoured conversation”. Coduri declined to comment, and Badland did not respond to a request for comment.

Several sources told the Guardian that Barrowman did indeed repeatedly expose himself on set, although they stressed the context was different to the sexually predatory behaviour Clarke is accused of. Barrowman is gay, and his actions were described as misjudged “larking about” and “joking”.

However, some Doctor Who crew members described an overly relaxed, at times unprofessional culture on set in the early seasons of the show. “David [Tennant, who joined the show in season 2] behaved impeccably,” said Jenna, “and to a certain extent, I think that helped rein things in.”

Jenna said she frequently witnessed Barrowman expose himself on set. “He would get his genitals out on a regular basis ... he’d just sort of have his balls hanging out his trousers or something, which he just thought was really funny,” she said. On one occasion, Jenna said that she witnessed Barrowman “slapping” his penis on the windscreen of one of the driver’s cars, “thinking it was really funny”.

Monica had similar recollections. “Sometimes he’d call me into his dressing room, and I would knock on the door and he’d say, ‘Oh, look at this’, and he’d just have his willy out, standing in the doorway,” she said. “It was kind of accepted that it was his thing,” she said.

Although she did not appreciate his behaviour, or find it particularly funny, Monica stressed she did not feel unsafe. “It just felt really uncomfortable,” she said.

Barrowman’s behaviour was even referenced in a lighthearted tribute song, called [The Ballad of Russell and Julie](#) and filmed to commemorate the end of [Tennant’s tenure](#) as the Doctor in 2008. The video is understood to have been filmed after cast and crew discovered Barrowman had been reprimanded for exposing himself on the set of Torchwood.



John Barrowman on Dancing On Ice for ITV, 2021. Photograph: Matt Frost/ITV/Rex

The tribute video was filmed for Doctor Who executive producers Julie Gardner and Russell T Davies. “Can’t block out,” sang Tennant, “please lock out, images of Johnny B getting his cock out.” The camera cuts to Barrowman, delivering a wink to the camera.

Gardner confirmed that she received a complaint around 2008 about Barrowman’s conduct on the set of Torchwood. “I met with John and reprimanded him,” Gardner said, adding that she also spoke to other executive producers, Barrowman’s agent, and the head of BBC drama commissioning, to “make it clear to both John and his agent that behaviour of this kind would not be tolerated ... To my knowledge, John’s inappropriate behaviour stopped thereafter,” she added.

She told the Guardian that she was not aware of any inappropriate behaviour by Clarke. “I am saddened and shocked by the accusations raised. If I had known of them there would have been prompt action taken,” she said. “I am grateful that people are coming forward to speak up and support them wholeheartedly.”

Russell T Davies also he never saw Barrowman expose himself, and was unaware of any complaints about Clarke's behaviour towards female coworkers on set and never heard of or witnessed inappropriate behaviour by the actor. Had he received a complaint, Davies said he would have acted immediately.

"I apologise wholeheartedly to any cast or crew who went through this," Davies said, adding: "all power to those coming forward now – we will listen to them, and learn".

‘My understanding and behaviour have changed’

A BBC spokesperson confirmed to the Guardian that Barrowman was reprimanded for this behaviour. "To be absolutely clear, we will investigate any specific allegations made by individuals to the BBC – and if anyone has been subjected to or witnessed inappropriate behaviour of any kind we would encourage them to raise it with us directly," a BBC spokesperson said.

"We have a zero tolerance approach and robust processes are in place – which are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect best practice – to ensure any complaints or concerns are handled with the utmost seriousness and care."

Lawyers for Barrowman said he did "not recall" the incidents recounted by Jenna and Monica. In 2008, Barrowman apologised for pulling down his trousers during a BBC Radio 1 interview. "I apologise for any offence I have caused," he said at the time. "I was joining in the light-hearted and fun banter of the show, and went too far."

In a statement in response to the latest allegations, Barrowman said at no point was he made aware of allegations against Clarke. As for his own actions, Barrowman said his "high-spirited behaviour" was "only ever intended in good humour to entertain colleagues on set and backstage".

"With the benefit of hindsight, I understand that upset may have been caused by my exuberant behaviour and I have apologised for this previously," he added. "Since my apology in November 2008, my understanding and

behaviour have also changed.” Barrowman added that he was at no point made aware of any allegations against Noel Clarke.

‘He would literally lean in and grab my thigh’

Clarke also stands accused of behaving inappropriately at an external function related to his role in Doctor Who. In May 2016, Lisa Graham volunteered at Bournemouth Film and Comic Con, held at the Bournemouth International Centre. She was assigned to help Clarke sign autographs and take photographs with paying fans. At this event, Graham alleges that Clarke sexually harassed her and touched her inappropriately under the table they were both sitting at.

“He would literally lean in and grab the outside of my thigh,” Graham recalled. On one occasion, she said, Clarke attempted to touch her inner thigh. “It started out on the knee,” she said, “but there was a point where he tried to lean towards my inner thigh, and I physically moved my chair to get away.”

When women walked past their stand, Graham said, Clarke would rate them out of 10 in terms of sexual attractiveness, and make derogatory and disrespectful comments.

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She also alleged that Clarke repeatedly asked her to have sex with him. Because they were both in public, Graham said she did not feel physically threatened by Clarke. However, she found his comments to be “disgusting”. At the end of the day, as they were packing away, Graham mentioned the harassment to her supervisor. The supervisor laughed away the remarks, Graham recalled, and did not appear to take it seriously.

Clarke’s lawyers said he never touched anyone inappropriately or in a sexual way, and pointed out that the convention was a public event, where there were always people present. They said Clarke had no specific recollections

of discussions with Graham, but wholly denied he would have conducted himself in the way she alleged.

In the statement released the day after the Guardian published allegations from 20 women, Clarke said: “I vehemently deny any sexual misconduct or criminal wrongdoing. Recent reports however have made it clear to me that some of my actions have affected people in ways I did not intend or realise. To those individuals, I am deeply sorry. I will be seeking professional help to educate myself and change for the better.”

This article was amended on 7 May 2021. Clarke was speaking at the Chicago Tardis convention in 2014, not 2015 as stated in an earlier version.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/may/07/noel-clarke-accused-of-sexual-harassment-on-doctor-who-set>

[Coronavirus](#)

New concerns as Indian Covid variant clusters found across England

Exclusive: Leaked emails show Public Health England assessment of ongoing risk from B16172 variant is ‘high’

- [What do we know about the Indian Covid variant?](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Leaked emails seen by the Guardian show the latest update on case numbers of the variant were delayed because of the local elections. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Leaked emails seen by the Guardian show the latest update on case numbers of the variant were delayed because of the local elections. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Nicola Davis](#) *Science Correspondent*

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 6 May 2021 14.09 EDT

Clusters of the [Indian variants of Covid-19](#) have been found across England, including in care homes, the Guardian has learned, amid growing fears about the speed with which they are spreading in communities.

The latest update of case numbers of these variants was due to be published on Thursday. But leaked emails seen by the Guardian show the announcement was delayed until at least Friday because of the local elections.

The documents also suggest officials from Public Health England are poised to escalate one of the variants to one “of concern”.

Scientists have been assessing three closely related variants first detected in India and since found in the UK because they may have mutations that help the virus to evade the body’s immune responses and be more transmissible due to their spike protein mutations.

All three of the variants – known as B16171, B16172 and B16173 – have been designated “under investigation” by Public Health England.

According to internal documents from PHE, dated to 5 May and seen by the Guardian, the assessment of the ongoing risk to public health from B16172 is “high”.

Every week PHE releases new data revealing the latest case numbers of variants that are either under investigation or deemed of concern.

But in an email containing details of the situation, a staff member at the Department of Health and Social Care wrote: “Data publication [is] to be delayed 24 hours from Thursday to Friday given it is local elections tomorrow.”

PHE said the delay was due to “[a processing issue](#)”.

In addition, the email said one of the India variants – likely B16172 – could be upgraded to a variant of concern as soon as Friday, as part of a broader set of communications.

In the PHE documents, 48 clusters of Indian variant B16172 have been identified, including those linked to secondary schools and religious gatherings, with evidence of community transmission in some of the clusters.

In London clusters have been located in care homes.

Dr Deepti Gurdasani, a clinical epidemiologist and senior lecturer at Queen Mary University of London, said the variant was “increasing very rapidly” and that “at the current doubling rate it could easily become dominant in London by the end of May or early June”.

The documents reveal 15 cases of B16172 were found in one London care home where residents had their second doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine in the week prior to the outbreak. Four of the cases were hospitalised with non-severe illness, and there were no deaths.

It comes as public health officials revealed B16172 has been found for the first time in [Northern Ireland](#), with seven cases confirmed. “While preventive measures – including travel restrictions – are very important, the assessment is that these will delay rather than permanently prevent the spread of variants already detected elsewhere on these islands,” said the chief medical officer for [Northern Ireland](#), Dr Michael McBride, adding the news was not entirely unexpected.

“The most effective way to stop variants developing or spreading is to keep pushing down infection rates and transmission of the virus in our community,” he added. “All variants spread in the same way. We protect ourselves and others by following public health advice and getting vaccinated when our turn comes.”

[Cases of the India variants have risen dramatically](#) in recent weeks in the UK. The key driver of the rise appears to be B16172.

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 can 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 ends, but people will be encouraged to stay local. People will still be 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 can reopen. Most outdoor venues can open, 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 reopening are settings such as zoos and theme parks. However, social contact rules will 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

Again with the caveat "no earlier than 17 May", depending on data, vaccination levels and current transmission rates.

Step 3 entails that most mixing rules are lifted outdoors, with a limit of 30 people meeting in parks or gardens. Indoor mixing will be allowed, up to six people or, if it is more people, two households. Indoor venues such as the inside of pubs and restaurants, hotels and B&Bs, play centres, cinemas and group exercise classes will reopen. The new indoor and outdoor mixing limits will remain for pubs and other hospitality venues.

For sport, indoor venues can have up to 1,000 spectators or half capacity, whichever is lower; outdoors the limit will be 4,000 people or half capacity, whichever is lower. Very large outdoor seated venues, such as big football stadiums, where crowds can be spread out, will have a limit of 10,000 people, or a quarter full, whichever is fewer. Weddings will be allowed a limit of 30 people, with other events such as christenings and barmitzvahs also permitted.

This will be the earliest date at which international holidays could resume, subject to a separate review.

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*

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

But Prof Ravi Gupta of the University of Cambridge, who researches variant mutations, said he believed all the India variants should be designated

variants of concern “given we can’t afford to be wrong”.

Prof Christina Pagel, the director of the clinical operational research unit at University College London and a member of the Independent Sage group of experts, said: “Clearly this variant has escaped into the community and is spreading quickly. It highlights the fundamental weakness of the red list travel system in that we just don’t know where the next dangerous variant is coming from. This should prompt a complete overhaul of our travel policy for the summer.”

Pagel added that the data should have been made publicly available.

“Public Health England are clearly very concerned about the rapid spread of this variant – as they should be,” she said. “But telling the public about a public health emergency should not need to wait for a specific release day or local elections – this should have been communicated earlier, not least to protect communities where the clusters are.”

[NHS Covid jab booking site leaks people’s vaccine status](#)
[Read more](#)

Gurdasani said while research was ongoing to explore the impact of the variants’ mutations, action was needed now, noting that people were continuing to mix, trials around large gatherings were being carried out, there has been [a proposed relaxation of some Covid measures in schools](#), and England was planning to restart some international leisure travel on 17 May.

“What is happening in reality is completely opposite to the stuff that I am seeing from [the PHE documents], which suggests there is cause for actual alarm,” she said.

A spokesperson for PHE said it would not comment on leaked data.

Dr William Welfare, the Covid-19 incident director at PHE, confirmed that there had been clusters in care homes. “Public Health England is monitoring the situation closely and appropriate public health interventions, including

targeted testing and enhanced contact tracing, are being undertaken,” he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/06/new-concerns-indian-covid-variant-clusters-found-across-england-ongoing-risk-high>

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NHS

UK needs £102bn boost to NHS and social care, says major report

Funding from higher taxes would cut avoidable deaths and improve equality after the Covid pandemic

- Guardian Live discussion on how NHS has performed during pandemic - [book tickets here](#)



The government must use the pandemic as an opportunity to fundamentally improve the NHS and social care, say the reports' authors. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

The government must use the pandemic as an opportunity to fundamentally improve the NHS and social care, say the reports' authors. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

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

Thu 6 May 2021 18.30 EDT

Spending on the [NHS](#), social care and public health needs to rise by £102bn over the next decade, funded by big tax rises, to improve Britain's health in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, an inquiry has said.

The massive funding boost would cut avoidable deaths from cancer and heart disease, tackle glaring health inequalities and rebuild the NHS after Covid exposed weaknesses such as a lack of beds and staff, a team of experts urged ministers on Friday.

The money would come largely from increases in income tax, national insurance and VAT, which evidence suggests the public is willing to pay, according to a four-year commission of inquiry by the London School of Economics and the Lancet medical journal.

“Without concerted action and increased funding we risk the UK falling further behind other high-income countries in health outcomes and life expectancy, continued deterioration in service provision and worsening inequalities, increased reliance on private funding and an NHS that is poorly equipped to respond to future major threats to health,” said Dr Michael Anderson of the LSE, the commission's joint research lead.

The government must seize on the pandemic as an opportunity to transform the NHS, social care and public health so that they can drive much-needed improvements to the nation's health, which still lags behind that in many other high-income countries in key respects, the 33 health experts involved said in a 123-page report that also assesses the health service's response to Covid.

In the report, which they describe as “a call to action”, they called for UK spending in those three areas combined to increase dramatically from £185bn today to £288bn by 2030/31, with every sector getting a 4% budget uplift for each of the next 10 years. Under their plans, the NHS budget across the four home nations would soar from £162bn to £239bn.

Their blueprint envisages the extra money coming in two major phased rounds of tax rises: 1p on income tax, national insurance and VAT by 2025-26 and then a further 2p increase in both income tax and NICs, plus another 1p on VAT, by 2030-31. That would mean someone on £25,000 a year

paying an extra £6 a week, and someone on £50,000 an additional £15 a week, by 2025/26.

The plan has been drawn up by two highly rated economists: Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and Prof Anita Charlesworth, director of research and economics at the [Health](#) Foundation.

Such unprecedented budget increases across the three sectors are needed “to ensure that the health and care system can meet demand, rebuild after the pandemic and develop resilience against further acute shocks and major threats to health”, the commissioners said. But they recognise that persuading ministers to approve such hefty rises will be “challenging in economically and geopolitically uncertain times”.

“For the NHS to be truly the envy of the world again politicians will need to be honest with the public that this will require increased taxation to meet funding levels of other comparable high-income countries,” said Prof Elias Mossialos of the LSE, the commission’s co-chair.

[Tax rises are no longer taboo in the UK. The party that grasps this could reap huge rewards | James Johnson](#)
[Read more](#)

The report highlighted how, despite being the world’s fifth largest economy, Britain comes only ninth in an international league table of health spending as judged by the proportion of GDP invested, its 10.35% coming behind Germany (11.7%), France (11.2%) and Japan (11.1%). Judged by health spending per head, the UK comes 13th, based on allocating £3,620 per person.

The report also:

- Warns Boris Johnson to drop his planned reorganisation of the NHS in England, which will feature in next week’s Queen’s speech, which it said will be disruptive and bring no benefits.

- Urges ministers and the NHS to ramp up efforts to stop people succumbing to preventable illnesses in the first place by cracking down on smoking, drinking and poor diet.
- Proposes an end to the [serious staff shortages](#) affecting most parts of the NHS, especially in England, through the creation of a sustainable supply of healthcare workers.

Social care should be reformed to make it easier for Britain's ageing population to access by increasing the level of savings someone can have before they are charged from £23,250 to £100,000, and by capping lifetime care costs at £75,000. Johnson has reportedly dropped plans to overhaul social care from the Queen's speech, despite his pledge when he entered No 10 in 2019 to "fix" it with a plan which was ready to be implemented. Downing Street insists the plans are due to be announced this year.

In the first comprehensive assessment of how the NHS responded to Covid, the LSE/Lancet report praises its rapid expansion of intensive care capacity, redeployment of staff to look after patients fighting for their lives, innovations in treatment and the delivery of the Covid vaccination programme.

But Dr Emma Pitchforth, the joint research lead, said that "during the pandemic the NHS has struggled in the face of poor decision-making by government, including delayed implementation of social distancing measures, poor coordination with local authorities and public health teams [and] a dysfunctional test-and-trace system".

Covid also exposed "chronic weaknesses" in the NHS, including low numbers – by international standards – of doctors, nurses, hospital beds and scanners used to diagnose diseases like cancer, the report said.

But Sally Warren, director of policy at the influential King's Fund thinktank, said tax rises were highly unlikely under Boris Johnson.

"This government has manifesto commitments to not increase income tax, national insurance or VAT. Public polling has often shown that people

support increases in taxation to support the NHS, but it is less clear if that extends to related services such as social care and public health.

“If not, there is a risk of repeating the mistakes of the last decade, which saw NHS funding prioritised but spending on other services that promote health and wellbeing neglected. This meant that improvements in life expectancy stalled, inequalities widened and demand for NHS services soared.”

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: “Our NHS has faced huge challenges over the past year due to Covid-19 and we continue to support our incredible health and care staff who have kept services open for thousands of patients.

“We have made £63bn available for health services over the last year and an additional £29bn next year, including new investment to address backlogs and tackle long waiting lists which have built up because of the pandemic.

“Improving adult social care remains a priority for this government and we will bring forward proposals later this year,” the spokesperson added.

Join a Guardian Live discussion about how the NHS has performed during the pandemic, amid new government plans for another reorganisation. With Denis Campbell, Dr Rachel Clarke and Sir David Nicholson on Wednesday 12 May, 7pm BST | 8pm CEST | 11am PDT | 2pm EDT. Book tickets [here](#).

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NHS

Reforming the NHS: key proposals by LSE-Lancet commission

Report offers blueprint for high-quality health and social care services with £288bn budget by 2030

- Guardian Live discussion on how NHS has performed during pandemic - [book tickets here](#)



NHS staff protest over pay outside St Thomas' hospital in London in April.
Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/Rex

NHS staff protest over pay outside St Thomas' hospital in London in April.
Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/Rex

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

Thu 6 May 2021 18.30 EDT

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the best and worst in the NHS: protection has been offered to people in differing regions but poor integration between the service and social care has been evident, and so too the chronic underfunding of social care and low staff numbers, according to a report from the [London School of Economics-Lancet commission](#).

The commission, looking at the possible future of the [NHS](#), has called on the government to commit to long-term funding for healthcare, and set out other recommendations to try to solve the troubles facing the [NHS](#).

Here are some of the key issues:

Funding of the NHS, social care and public health

Plan: The LSE-Lancet commission proposes a £102bn increase in UK spending on the NHS, social care and public health, taking the total outlay from £185bn now to £288bn by 2030-31. That would involve increasing the budget of each of those three services by 4% a year every year for 10 years.

Most of the £102bn would come from rises in income tax, national insurance and VAT. Initially there would be a 1p increase in all three by 2025-26 – a move the experts call “progressive, broad-based, general taxation” – and further 2p uplifts in both income tax and NI by 2030/31.

[Info box](#)

Analysis: Any government would think very hard about committing to such large increases over so many years, especially given that more than £300bn has already been spent tackling Covid. The commission admits that securing ministerial approval for such tax rises would be “challenging in economically and geopolitically uncertain times”.

Social care

Plan: The sector needs an immediate £3.2bn cash injection to improve and expand care for elderly people, children and disabled people, the experts say. They also propose making the means test for receipt of free social care much more generous by raising the savings people can hold from £23,250 to

£100,000 before they no longer qualify for local authority care funding, and capping care costs at £75,000.

[GDP spend](#)

Analysis: The multiple financial and political risks involved in replacing the creaking, inadequate, social care system in England with a high-quality and affordable alternative help explain why successive governments have examined the problem but, despite pressure to act, taken no meaningful action.

Boris Johnson pledged to fix the problem as soon as he entered Downing Street in 2019 but has done nothing and has dropped plans for social care reform from the Queen's speech next week. It is unclear when any government will grasp the nettle and push through radical change.

Public health

Plan: This sector also needs its own £3.2bn budget boost straight away, the commission says. That would help make up for years of cuts to public health budgets, ensure more money goes to poorer areas, where the burden of preventable illness is higher, and expand the workforce. The 4% rises would allow public health teams to do more to reduce the number of people suffering from cancer and heart disease and close the gap on this between Britain and other rich nations.[1](#)

[health spending](#)

Analysis: The experts make the case for big budget rises for all three services, not just the NHS, given that weaknesses in social care and public health drive demand for NHS care. But the sums of money thought necessary are unlikely to gain Treasury approval. And tough government action to curb smoking, drinking and especially poor diets, would arguably do as much to improve the nation's health, and stop people getting ill in the first place, than the work of public health teams.

Sustainable and fit-for-purpose health and care workforce

Plan: Each of the four nations in the UK should draw up a strategy to guarantee that they will have enough skilled staff in the NHS and social care in future, with workforce planning then coordinated across the UK from 2022. Technology, such as remote appointments, should be deployed to help as far as possible.

[doctors](#)

Analysis: Widespread staff shortages led to the NHS in England drawing up its NHS people plan, but it was short of practical solutions that would make a big difference and not backed by any new funding. The LSE-Lancet report does not set out any compelling new ideas for ensuring sufficient supply of care staff in the years ahead either, even though Britain is involved in a global race to recruit doctors and nurses.

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2021.05.07 - Coronavirus

- [Vaccines Choice of vaccines to be offered to Britons under 40](#)
- [Covid vaccines US-Germany rift as Berlin opposes plan to ditch patents](#)
- [US How companies could use patients' data from Covid vaccine drive](#)
- ['Strange object' North Korea says leaflets from South could carry Covid](#)

Vaccines and immunisation

Choice of Covid vaccines to be offered to Britons under 40

Expansion follows advice to allow more people to opt out of the AstraZeneca shot over clotting fears

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



A vaccination centre at the Oval, London. People recently diagnosed with blood clots tend to be younger. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

A vaccination centre at the Oval, London. People recently diagnosed with blood clots tend to be younger. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

[Sarah Boseley](#) *Health editor*

Thu 6 May 2021 18.43 EDT

A choice of Covid vaccines is to be extended from the under-30s to anyone up to the age of 40, after a recommendation by the government's advisory body to allow more people to opt out of the [AstraZeneca](#) shot, which has been linked to rare cases of blood clots, it has emerged.

Very small numbers of people have suffered from blood clots in the veins and the brain, in combination with low platelets. Investigations by UK and European regulators have linked these events to the AstraZeneca vaccine, while in the United States cases have been reported following the Johnson & Johnson jab, which is made in a similar way.

There have been over 200 cases in the UK according to Dr Sue Pavord, who is on the haematologists' working group that is monitoring the cases in the UK, but that is among many millions of doses of vaccine.

However, those affected tend to be younger people, even though relatively few of the youngest adults have yet been vaccinated. "We're seeing it affecting quite young ages so the median age of our cases is actually 49, which is relatively young," she said at a Royal Society of Medicine event on Thursday.

Pavord said the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA), which collects data on side-effects of drugs and vaccines, was keeping an eye on developments.

"I think it's very concerning, this disease in young people who are perhaps less at risk of Covid infection itself and certainly of being hospitalised with that," she said. "And that's why I think the MHRA is really keeping an eye on the cases, and they are looking at age-based incidences of this condition compared with the numbers vaccinated and comparing that with statistical modelling of Covid-19 infection and fatalities per age group. It may well be that they increase the age cutoff."

Informed by the MHRA data, the expert advisory group, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) appears to have already made the decision to allow not [just the under-30s](#) but anyone up to the age of 40 to choose an alternative vaccine to AstraZeneca's, according to

the Telegraph, which cites political sources. Choices will only be offered where supplies of alternatives are available, however.

“Because prevalence of Covid is low and given the strength of the programme, that means we’re in a position to act with an abundance of caution and offer a different vaccine to the younger groups,” the source is said to have told the newspaper.

The discovery of cases of blood clots apparently linked to the vaccination caused consternation in Europe, where some countries have suspended the vaccine altogether while others have limited its use to older people.

But the European Medicines Agency as well as the MHRA have said the risks of Covid far outweigh those of blood clots, particularly for older age groups.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson reiterated that position.

“Over 50m vaccines have now been administered, providing millions of people with protection against Covid-19 and saving thousands of lives,” the spokesperson said.

“The position of our independent medicines regulator, the MHRA, and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) continues to be that the benefits of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine outweigh the risks for the vast majority of adults.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/06/choice-of-covid-vaccines-to-be-offered-to-britons-under-40-as-well-as-under-30>

Germany

US-Germany rift as Berlin opposes plan to ditch Covid vaccine patents

- Germany says waiver would inhibit private sector research
- Opposition to Biden plan threatens to deadlock WTO talks



The Biden government's announcement on vaccine patent waivers was welcomed by the WHO as a step towards greater global equity. Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

The Biden government's announcement on vaccine patent waivers was welcomed by the WHO as a step towards greater global equity. Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

*[Julian Borger](#) in Washington and [Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor
Thu 6 May 2021 15.29 EDT*

The US and [Germany](#) are at odds on the issue of waivers for patents on Covid-19 vaccines, as Berlin argued that a waiver would not increase production and would inhibit future private sector research.

The disagreement is the first major rift between the two economic powers since Joe Biden took office, and threatens to deadlock discussions at the [World Trade Organization](#) (WTO) and sour relations within the G7 group of major industrialised democracies.

Any WTO decision on a waiver would have to be by consensus, so Germany opposition is a major obstacle to intellectual property rights on vaccines being suspended.

The Biden government's [announcement on Wednesday that it would back a waiver on vaccine patents](#) was welcomed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a step towards greater global equity at a time when poor countries have little access to vaccines and south Asia has been hit by a devastating outbreak. India accounted for 46% of the new Covid-19 cases recorded around the world over the past week, and there are signs the wave is spreading to Nepal, Sri Lanka and other neighbouring states.

[US support for Covid vaccine patent waivers puts pressure on EU and UK](#)
[Read more](#)

But Angela Merkel's government came out against a waiver on Thursday.

"The US suggestion for the lifting of patent protection for Covid-19 vaccines has significant implications for vaccine production as a whole," a government spokeswoman said.

"The limiting factors in the production of vaccines are the production capacities and the high-quality standards and not patents," she added, arguing that the companies were already working with partners to boost manufacturing capacity.

"The protection of intellectual property is a source of innovation and must remain so in the future."

The US secretary of state, Tony Blinken, said the patent waiver was just one of a variety of means the administration was looking at to intensify the struggle to contain the pandemic.

“The main thing is we have to speed this up,” Blinken told MSNBC during a visit to Ukraine. “On the current trajectory, if we don’t do more, if the entire world doesn’t do more, the world won’t be vaccinated until 2024. We can speed this up and get that done, I think, in a much shorter time. And if we do, we’re all going to be better off.”

Pharmaceutical companies reacted with anger to the US decision, and [shares in Chinese and American vaccine manufacturers tumbled](#). Some countries also expressed private astonishment, with one diplomat accusing the US of grandstanding by offering crowd-pleasing simplistic solutions to long-term problems.

In normal times, [patents preserve the profits](#) of the multinational companies that make drugs and vaccines, making it illegal for rivals to turn out cheap copycat versions for up to 20 years. But amid a pandemic in which the WHO says no one is safe until everyone is safe, campaigners say there is a powerful moral case for ditching them.

The Biden announcement on waivers has divided the European Union. Emmanuel Macron said he was “absolutely in favour” of the move, in marked a shift for France, which had previously argued that a patent waiver would discourage innovation.

The head of the European commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said the bloc was open to debate. She pointed out that the EU’s vaccination effort was accelerating, with 30 Europeans vaccinated each second, while exporting more than 200m doses. Von der Leyen said Europe was “also ready to discuss any proposals that address the crisis in an effective and pragmatic manner”.

“That’s why we are ready to discuss how the US proposal for a waiver on intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines could help achieve that objective,” she said.

The head of the panel reviewing the WHO's handling of the pandemic, Helen Clark, the former New Zealand prime minister, earlier called on countries that have obstructed the temporary suspension of intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines, such as the UK, Switzerland and EU states, to follow the US lead and back the initiative.

[Covid vaccines: what is patent waiving and will it solve the global shortage?](#)
[Read more](#)

She described the Biden administration's announcement as a game-changer and said pharmaceutical companies that had received billions in public money now needed to spread knowledge to scale up vaccine production.

"When the US moves it is such a powerful signal," Clark told the BBC. "One would expect the UK, the EU and Switzerland and others that have been obstructing the discussion on the waiver need to say: 'Yes, we are prepared to negotiate.'"

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex entered the debate on Thursday, calling on Covid vaccine manufacturers to act with "responsibility and leadership" and increase their allocation of doses distributed to poorer parts of the world.

Harry and Meghan have written an open letter to the chief executives of pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca urging them to redouble their support for the UN-sponsored Covax programme.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/06/us-germany-rift-covid-vaccine-patent-waivers>

US news

How US companies could use patients' data from Covid vaccine drive

Privacy advocates warn retail pharmacies in particular are blurring the line between public health and commerce



‘What happens to all these people whose data you now have in great volume?’ said Adam Tanner. Photograph: Kamil Krzaczynski/Reuters

‘What happens to all these people whose data you now have in great volume?’ said Adam Tanner. Photograph: Kamil Krzaczynski/Reuters



[Jessica Glenza](#)

[@JessicaGlenza](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Data rights organizations have warned that patients lack a clear understanding of how information about their health, employment, contact or location details may be used if it is collected by private entities during the Covid-19 vaccine drive.

Some advocates have already expressed concerns that the information could be used for marketing, targeted advertising or de-identified and sold into the multibillion-dollar health data industry.

[The US won't reach herd immunity this year. So how will it live with Covid?](#)

[Read more](#)

“This [vaccine] is a miracle of modern science, and it’s so important to get it as fast as possible to all the people, and yet all the secondary questions have been left aside,” said Adam Tanner, an associate professor at the Harvard University Institute for Quantitative Social Science.

He is also the author of *Our Bodies, Our Data: How Companies Make Billions Selling Our Medical Records*, which explores the market for de-identified health data. “What happens to all these people whose data you now have in great volume?”

Privacy advocates warn retail pharmacies in particular are blurring the line between public health and commerce. For example, Walgreens required all customers seeking a vaccine appointment to make an account, including an [opt-in to marketing emails](#), ReCode reported.

The company also encouraged people seeking vaccine appointments to join its loyalty program, which supplies data to the pharmacy’s advertising arm, Walgreens Advertising Group.

Non-profit hospitals have also opted in to the bonanza. RWJBarnabas Health, a large New Jersey hospital group which operates the Jersey City medical center, asked patients receiving a vaccine there to sign a form stating in part: “I understand I may be contacted as part of the hospital’s marketing activities”, and that patients could be contacted “as part of its fundraising activities”.

The US has relatively strong health information protections for individuals under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, best known as Hipaa. This law regulates how hospitals, pharmacies, doctors and insurers can share people’s health information.

However, it does allow for “de-identified” data to be sold and in an era when data behemoths such as Google are partnering with healthcare providers, the extent to which Hipaa protects personal information is [now being considered by courts](#). One distinct risk is, in partnership with large corporations which already own a huge amount of consumer data, individuals’ health records could effectively be “re-identified”.

Further, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also appears concerned about how data is being collected by private entities in the vaccine distribution campaign, and warned against using data for commercial purposes.

“Providers are prohibited from using any data gathered in the course of their participation in the CDC Covid-19 vaccination program ... for commercial marketing purposes,” the agency wrote. The agency continued: “Such data cannot be sold or otherwise provided to any other entity, except as required by the provider agreement.”

However, privacy experts are skeptical such guidance is sufficient.

“I would be surprised if that had any legally binding effect,” said Lee Tien, a senior staff attorney and privacy expert with the Electronic Frontier Foundation. “I would love it if it were, but I would be surprised by that.”

In a statement, RWJBarnabas said it “is committed to protect patient privacy and conduct any outreach subject to patient authorization and use patient identified data only as permitted by state and federal law, as stated in our consent.” The hospital group also said it would review, “and, if necessary, will make changes to our policies consistent with the April 2, 2021 CDC guidelines”.

Tanner said patients are being asked to submit all sorts of information that might be useful both medically, for example to avoid serious adverse vaccine reactions, but which also might be useful for private companies.

In his own example, he was asked to [update his address with CVS](#) to get a vaccine. This important information is vital for vaccinators, no doubt, but also could be used to market to Tanner in the future without any proof it came as a result of the vaccine drive.

“That information is medically useful but it’s also useful for sales and marketing, so I’m just raising the question – is the data properly protected amid this very important vaccination campaign?” he said.

“The answer is a little bit murky still.”

[South Korea](#)

North Korea says propaganda leaflets sent from South could carry coronavirus

State-run media in North warn people about a ‘strange object flying in the wind’ as South Korean police raid office of leaflet distributor



Park Sang-hak, a North Korean defector, shows leaflets denouncing North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to the media Photograph: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

Park Sang-hak, a North Korean defector, shows leaflets denouncing North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to the media Photograph: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

Staff and agencies

Thu 6 May 2021 22.33 EDT

North Korea has warned its citizens against reading propaganda leaflets sent via balloon over the border with the South, saying they could be carrying

coronavirus.

The state-run Rodong Sinmun newspaper urged people to stay [away from the leaflets](#), according to news agency Yonhap, saying: “Even when we come across a strange object flying in the wind, we must consider them as a possible route of transmission of the malicious virus rather than a natural phenomenon.” It advised people to “think and move” according to Covid-19 guidelines.

The warning came the day South Korean police raided the office of an activist who said he had used balloons to float hundreds of thousands of propaganda leaflets toward North Korea in defiance of a contentious new law.

Activist Park Sang-hak, a well-known North Korean defector, is the first person to be investigated since the legislation took effect in March.

The issue of propaganda leaflets has emerged as a new source of animosity between the two Koreas, with the North calling it a provocation and threatening to retaliate.

The Seoul Metropolitan police said the raid on the Seoul office of activist Park Sang-hak was related to his announcement that his group launched balloons carrying 500,000 leaflets, 5,000 US \$1 bills and 500 booklets about South Korea’s economic development across the border last week.

[South Korea bans activists from flying propaganda balloons over North Korea](#)

[Read more](#)

They refused to provide further details, citing the ongoing investigation.

Park, who rose to fame because of his campaign to send leaflets across the border, issued a brief statement saying police had arrived at his office. He later told reporters he would keep launching balloons despite the new law, which punishes flying leaflets, USB drives or money into North Korea with up to three years in prison.

“Even if we get three years in prison or even 30 years in prison ... we’ll continue to send anti-North leaflets to let our ragged, starving compatriots in North Korea know the truth” about their authoritarian government, Park said.

South Korean officials haven’t publicly confirmed that Park had in fact sent the leaflets. But in a statement on Sunday, Kim Yo-jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, said defectors in South Korea recently “scattered leaflets against” the North. She called their action “an intolerable provocation” and said her government would look into corresponding measures.



Park Sang-Hak holds a balloon containing leaflets denouncing North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in 2016. Photograph: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

Her statement caused concern that North Korea might launch some sort of provocation against South Korea. Last year, [North Korea blew up an empty inter-Korean liaison office](#) on its territory after Kim Yo-jong reacted furiously to similar propaganda leaflets sent over the border.

North Korea is extremely sensitive about any outside attempt to undermine Kim Jong-un’s leadership and weaken his absolute control over the country’s 26 million people, most of whom have little access to foreign news.

South Korean officials have said they would handle Park in line with the law, but any harsh treatment could deepen criticism that South Korea is sacrificing freedom of speech to improve ties with the North. Officials say the law is designed to avoid unnecessarily provoking North Korea and promote the safety of South Korean residents in border areas.

With Associated Press

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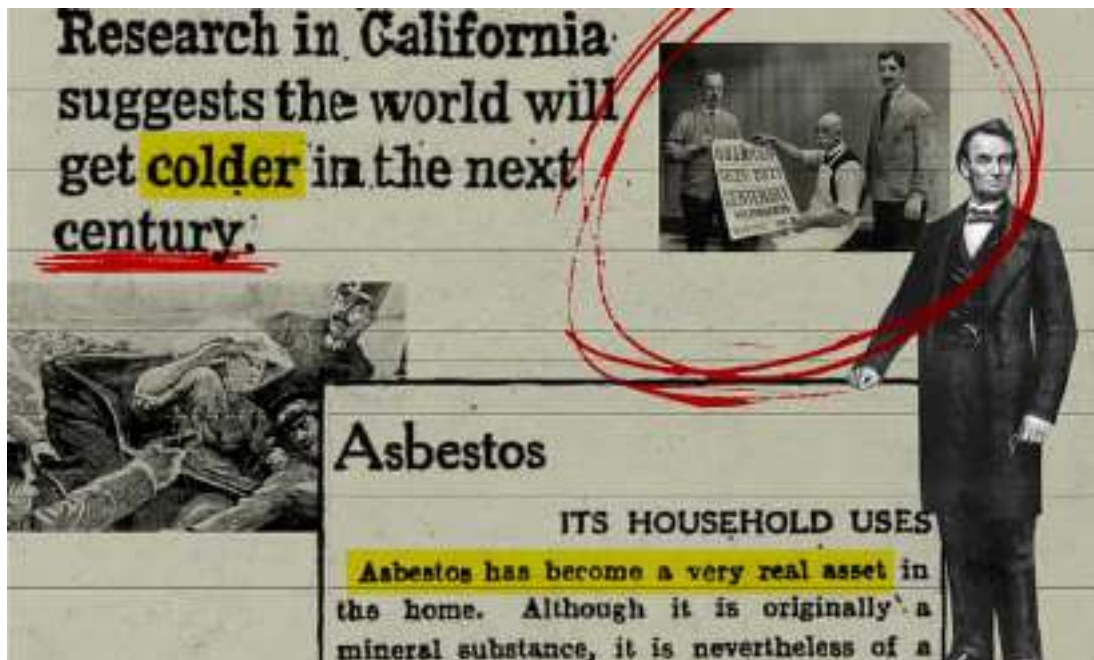
2021.05.07 - Spotlight

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The Guardian For 200 years

[Guardian 200](#)[The Guardian](#)

What we got wrong: the Guardian's worst errors of judgment over 200 years



From left: artist's rendition of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in 1914; Manchester Guardian staff in 1921;

Abraham Lincoln. Composite: AP/Guardian

From left: artist's rendition of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in 1914; Manchester Guardian staff in 1921; Abraham Lincoln. Composite: AP/Guardian

Fiercely critical of Abraham Lincoln and at times racist, this newspaper's leader columns did not always get it right

- Celebrate 200 years of independent Guardian journalism, and help power our future – [make a contribution](#), or [become a subscriber](#)

[Randeep Ramesh](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 02.00 EDT

A daily newspaper cannot publish for 200 years without getting some things wrong. This one has made its share of mistakes.

There will always be errors of news judgment given the nature of the work. Tight deadlines meant the [sinking of the Titanic](#) was relegated to a small spot on page 9 in 1912; errors of scientific understanding resulted in a 1927 article that promoted [the virtues of asbestos](#), and others in the late 1970s that warned of [a looming ice age](#).

But the most noticeable missteps stem not from the news pages but from the editorial column. For it is here that readers find out what the paper thinks about the great issues of the day. And it is here that mistakes are inked most indelibly into history, whether they relate to suffrage, reform or, most notably in recent years, the debate over Brexit.

To err is human. But making the wrong call is both inevitable and painful. To see why the Guardian thinks the way it does, it is useful to start with the interests it originally sought to advance. The Manchester Guardian was born of moderate radicalism, and began life in 1821 as a mouthpiece for male middle-class political reform.



Copy of the Manchester Guardian from 16 June 1821. Photograph: Scan of newspaper/The Guardian

In the years after the 1832 Reform Act, upwardly mobile men were enfranchised and the paper steadily lost its radical edge. When revolution convulsed Europe in the middle of the 19th century, the Manchester Guardian had little sympathy for the insurrectionists. “Nationalism was associated with democracy in 1848,” wrote David Ayerst in his history of the newspaper, “and democracy was still suspect in the Guardian circle.” The paper’s leader column declared support for martial law in Ireland to quell political turbulence as famine stalked the land. Its cold-hearted analysis was that Ireland could only feed itself if freed from its dependence on a few crops, and that required capital that would not be forthcoming without political stability.

Fear of the mob dominated this period of the Manchester Guardian’s thinking. The paper advocated political reform – extending the franchise and promoting secret ballots – but it wanted to limit voting to male ratepayers. The call was for a property-based democracy, sound money and rational government. The Manchester Guardian wanted no part in the most widespread revolutionary wave in European history. It was also a proudly imperialist paper. When the [Indian mutiny](#) broke out in 1857 – a rebellion acknowledged as the greatest challenge to any European power in the 19th

century – [the leader column](#) on 26 September of that year thundered with racism that England must retain “unfaltering confidence in our right to rule over the native population by virtue of inherent superiority”.



Abraham Lincoln, despised in his day by the Manchester Guardian.
Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Victorian liberalism was beset by double standards: while Asians could not be trusted with self-determination, Americans could be. More than 150 years ago the paper believed that the southern US states had the right to secede. It suspected that a free Confederacy would prosper and claimed it was as entitled to freedom as the Hungarians were when they had broken away from Austria in 1849. [The Guardian](#) reasoned that the breakup of the US would hasten the end of slavery, which it despised. This view was shared by William Gladstone of the Liberal party, who would be prime minister four times.

The paper’s support for the Confederacy led to a loathing of Abraham Lincoln that today seems petty and shameful. For the Guardian of the 1860s, Lincoln was a fraud who treated emancipation of the slaves as negotiable because it stood in the way of US unity. In 1862, reflecting on his election the previous year, the paper said “it is impossible not to feel that it was an evil day both for America and the world”. Three years later an editorial on

the president's assassination scaled new heights of anti-Lincoln mania. "Of his rule we can never speak except as a series of acts abhorrent to every true notion of constitutional right and human liberty," [the paper wrote](#), before tactfully adding: "It is doubtless to be regretted that he had not the opportunity of vindicating his good intentions."

Under the editorship of CP Scott, the paper moved from the right of the Liberal party to the left, not so much following Gladstone as scouting ahead of him. From the late 1880s the editorial line is more radical and the paper's politics feel more familiar. Scott supported the movement for women's suffrage, but was critical of any suffragette direct action. In his leader he wrote: "The really ludicrous position is that Mr Lloyd George is fighting to enfranchise 7 million women and the militants are smashing unoffending people's windows and breaking up benevolent societies' meetings in a desperate effort to prevent him."

When Arthur Balfour, then Britain's foreign secretary, promised 104 years ago to help establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, his words changed the world. The Guardian of 1917 supported, celebrated and could even be said to have helped facilitate the Balfour declaration. Scott was a supporter of Zionism and this blinded him to Palestinian rights. In 1917 he [wrote a leader](#) on the day the Balfour declaration was announced, in which he dismissed any other claim to the Holy Land, saying: "The existing Arab population of Palestine is small and at a low stage of civilisation." [Whatever else can be said, Israel today is not the country the Guardian foresaw or would have wanted.](#)



The Guardian leader of 9 November 1917 on the Balfour declaration.
 Photograph: Guardian

Under Scott, the Manchester Guardian made its name in foreign affairs, notably opposing the [second Boer war](#) against popular opinion. When Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, were shot dead in Sarajevo in June 1914, Scott saw few signs that the continent would be disturbed, let alone that a world war would follow. [The Guardian leader said](#): “It is not to be supposed that the death of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand will have any immediate or salient effect on the politics of Europe.”

The truth is that Scott, like all prognosticators, could only view the historical process in the rear-view mirror. He couldn't foretell the future. The Manchester Guardian's long-serving editor would have known that previous predictions had been superseded in ways he could not have foreseen. He understood that the growth of technology and society's increasing ability to dominate nature meant that societies that were scientifically effective would dominate societies that were not. But no one could know the different set of priorities later generations would have.

[embed](#)

Having been a strong supporter of the Liberal party in the 19th century, the Manchester Guardian warmed to the Labour party in the 20th, while never losing its Liberal connections. Scott spent much of the last three decades of his life calling for Labour and the old Liberal party to cooperate and save the country from Conservative domination, a cause that is still very much alive today in the paper.

In 1945, a new editor, Alfred Powell Wadsworth, erred in declaring that “the chances of Labour sweeping the country ... are pretty remote” and called in an editorial for the “most fruitful coalition in these times: a Liberal-Labour government”. The paper looked badly wrongfooted by the Labour landslide.

Almost all the Guardian’s election leaders since the second world war have endorsed either Labour or the Liberals, and sometimes both. The exception came in 1951, when AP Wadsworth’s dislike of Labour’s health minister, Aneurin Bevan, saw the paper back Churchill’s Tories.

Editors do make a difference: under Wadsworth the Manchester Guardian took a surprisingly conservative view of the foundation of the National Health Service. While supporting the changes as a “great step forward”, the Guardian feared that the state providing welfare “risks an increase in the proportion of the less gifted”. Alastair Hetherington, a strait-laced military man who edited the Guardian in the swinging 60s, earned the distinction of being in charge [when the first “fuck” appeared in a British or American newspaper after a jury in 1960](#) decided Lady Chatterley’s Lover was not obscene. During the trial, Hetherington had gone to great lengths to ensure that Guardian news reports did not print swearwords used in open court, only for an opinion piece to do so.



Alastair Hetherington, left, with Peter Preston. Photograph: Peter Johns/The Guardian

From the early 70s, the Guardian's leaders alighted on consumerism and overpopulation as existential crises. A 1970 editorial wondered how, if the world's population doubled, a decent standard of living could be maintained. Such Malthusian fears have not been realised. When the facts change, the Guardian changes its mind. In 1982 the paper thought that a windmill to generate electricity on "every British hilltop would be an environmental disaster". It would not say that today.

And then there is Europe. The postwar Guardian had been a reliably European newspaper. The paper looked favourably on joining the Common Market from the late 1950s. The Guardian was running, it felt, with the tide of history: so much so that when the UK did not join the euro in 2003, the leader column described it as "the biggest setback to the pro-European cause for a generation".

The UK's place within the European club had been secured by an in/out referendum in 1975 called by Harold Wilson, who wanted the electorate to settle a question that divided the Labour party. The Guardian found itself siding with a small pro-European band in Labour, as well as almost all Tories and the Liberal party. On Thursday 5 June 1975, in a leader

headlined: “A vote for the next century”, the paper called for voters to endorse Britain’s membership of the Common Market in that day’s referendum to ensure the country would be “safer and more prosperous”.

Since then, referendums have become, much to the paper’s displeasure, an established part of our constitution, used as a way to stamp democratic legitimacy on to controversial ideas and as a tool of party management. The Guardian, aware of the historical significance of such votes, had got into a habit of telling readers how they ought to cast their ballot on the morning of the vote. On the day of referendums in 1998 the leader column suggested voters in Northern Ireland back the Good Friday Agreement and asked Londoners to back a mayoralty. In 2014, on the day of the Scottish independence referendum, it urged Scots to stick with the union.

No country had ever voted to leave the European Union before. The Guardian had been clear in the run-up to 2016’s Brexit vote that the electorate ought to vote to stay in. But on the morning of 23 June 2016, the paper did not tell readers how it thought they should vote. Instead, on a vote that would define the country’s role in the next century, the leader said: “The UK will, gradually, put the tensions of the campaign behind it, however painful they have been, and start instead to focus on its future.”

History had other ideas. Perhaps the Guardian’s unwavering belief in the strength of the EU’s case was a source of complacency. If so, it was not the only paper to suffer such delusions. As Julie Firmstone of Leeds University [put it in 2016](#): “Most disappointingly, whilst the leave papers pulled out all the stops on polling day, only the Mirror clearly called for a vote to remain.”

While the Guardian leader column is now just one voice among many, it still represents the only long-range institutional view. It represents not any one person’s belief but an attempt to distil values that have evolved across the centuries. The column tries to keep in mind past mistakes and to proceed with humility. No one knows the verdicts history will hand down on the opinions that appear obvious today.

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Books

Living through India's pandemic: 'Oxygen is the new currency'

As India is devastated by a crippling second wave of coronavirus, its leaders' response to the pandemic is causing anguish and disbelief, writes author Jeet Thayil

- ['We are witnessing a crime against humanity': Arundhati Roy on India's Covid catastrophe](#)



Pyres are prepared to cremate the deceased in Delhi. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Pyres are prepared to cremate the deceased in Delhi. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Jeet Thayil](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 01.22 EDT

When the second wave began, we woke each day with a premonition of dread and as the days passed, and the toll climbed, taking our family members, our friends, our acquaintances and colleagues, the dread became ever present, like the dead, who took up residence in our hearts. Then came the fear, which crippled us even when the fever did not. We thought ourselves lucky if we did not fall ill, knowing it was only a matter of time before it would be us on the pavement outside a crowded, underfunded hospital, begging for a bed from the overwhelmed orderlies and nurses.

People spoke in metaphors. They spoke of apocalypse and its bearded saffron-clad horsemen, of inferno and the pyres of hell that burned in parking lots, in open fields, in the streets adjoining graveyards and [crematoria](#). They spoke of life during wartime. But instead of air raid sirens we heard ambulances, day and night. There were curfews and lockdowns and shortages. There were [hoarders](#) and black marketers. Oxygen and medicine became the new currency. The cries of the stricken appeared on our social feeds, asking for a cylinder of oxygen, a vial of remdesivir, a hospital bed, home remedies, any kind of advice or solace. And it was on social media that we found help, and if not help then sympathy. We found others who shared the nightmare to which we woke. Strangers stepped forward to set up their own networks of rescue, beyond bureaucracy, religion and politics, complete strangers who cooked for the sick and checked up on them, who spent entire days arranging a bed or medication, who found care for the small children orphaned overnight. This miracle began in a matter of days, just as soon as we understood that those we had elected to protect us had failed us at the time of our greatest need.



‘We heard ambulances day and night’ ... Jeet Thayil. Photograph: Ishan Tankha/The Guardian

Since the pandemic began, some of us have looked to our prime minister for comfort. He was our guru, in his immaculate wardrobe and shaped beard, whose shining image looked down on us from billboards and newspaper advertisements. We waited, hoping for a word of understanding, some acknowledgment of our grief. In thrall to his magnetism, to the aura of wisdom and invulnerability that surrounded him like a halo, we believed in him most when he spoke, with his arms opened wide as if to embrace the entire nation, as if he would take upon himself our suffering. But when an announcement did arrive it was to tell the people of West Bengal that they would receive the vaccine for free if they voted for him. (An election he went on to lose.) Otherwise he rarely addressed the nation. If he did, it was to tell us that religious gatherings would continue because we had defeated the virus, an achievement only we had accomplished, because we were Indians, exceptional, the pharmacists and inventors of the world, not heroes but superheroes. His voice was his charisma; when he spoke we believed.

But many among us had lost their faith. If this was a war then the crimes of our leaders were war crimes and they should be tried accordingly, they said. These voices were branded anti-national, even as they called out the robed chief minister of our most populous state, whose response to those begging

for oxygen was to threaten to take away their property; and the home minister who campaigned while the disease raged; the health minister who said the nation's vaccine rollout was the fastest in the world when it was among the slowest, and assured us there was no reason to be afraid because the virus was not so virulent among Indians and, besides, we had one of the lowest fatality rates in the world; the solicitor general who called us crybabies when our capital city asked for oxygen. These men took their cue from the prime minister, whose bloated ego, monumental vanity and lack of empathy was unforgivable negligence. We let them talk. The faithless do not know that our true power is not the belief that we hold a special place in history; it is our talent for forgetfulness. In three years, when the next elections take place, we will have forgotten our anguish and our dead. Our memory is shallow, contingent, buyable. We will return our leaders to power.

Jeet Thayil's Names of the Women is published by Jonathan Cape. To order a copy go to guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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[Music](#)

Interview

Olivia Rodrigo: ‘I’m a teenage girl. I feel heartbreak and longing really intensely’

[Laura Snapes](#)



Olivia Rodrigo ... ‘Do you want me to write a song about income taxes?’
Photograph: Grant Spanier

Olivia Rodrigo ... ‘Do you want me to write a song about income taxes?’
Photograph: Grant Spanier

The Drivers License singer reflects on turning her first big breakup into the year’s biggest hit – and how songwriting saved her from the anxieties of being a Disney star



Fri 7 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Do you remember your first heartbreak? If not, 18-year-old Olivia Rodrigo's debut single, *Drivers License*, may awaken some dusty memories. The story of passing her test and driving past the house of the ex she had planned to celebrate with, it filters Adele-scale devastation through Taylor Swift's wit and Lorde's mysticism, balancing hangdog self-pity ("I've never felt this way for no one!") with stinging indignation: "Guess you didn't mean what you wrote in that song about me!" she belts at its climax. Perhaps being called out as a phoney songwriter is even worse than being a cad.

Released in January, *Drivers License* sprang (almost) out of nowhere like a heaved sob. Four days later, it broke Spotify records for the most single-day streams (Christmas songs exempted). The next day, it broke that record again. After 10 weeks at No 1 in the US and nine in the UK, it has been streamed 1.9bn times. Next Tuesday, the California-born songwriter makes her live debut at the Brits; the following weekend, she does *Saturday Night Live*; a week later she releases her debut album, *Sour*, a grippingly well written – all by her – collection of balladry, pop-punk, bitter diatribes and euphoric taunts that dwells on this romantic treachery. Even in an era when virality powers pop, Rodrigo's is a fast rise.

Quarantine restrictions mean arriving 10 days pre-Brits, so we speak on Wednesday morning, just 24 hours after Rodrigo landed in the UK. She is isolating just outside London. Mild hoarseness aside, she shows no trace of her terrible jet lag and is more alert and composed than any human I've encountered since March 2020. She supposedly just woke up but her eyeliner is tidy, her skin glowy. This week inside is a chance to nail some homework – “economics and English, all the good stuff like that, and environmental science, ugh, gross” – so she can graduate high school this year. In the first song she ever posted online, I'm More, she sang, “I care way too much about getting into college”, but notions of further studying (psychology, English or history) are on hold.

Rodrigo was homeschooled long before the pandemic. She has been a Disney star since 2016, first in Bizaardvark, about two oddball vloggers, then High School Musical: The Musical: The Series (HSM), a mockumentary where the “real-life” teenagers attending the school where the original movies were filmed stage their own musical of HSM. The stars learn on set; fake Disney high school is as close as they'll get to the real thing. Rodrigo questioned whether her unconventional life would make her songwriting unrelatable. Lorde's debut, Pure Heroine, inspired her to get serious about it at age 12. “She talks about driving to the suburbs and going to school and all her friend-group drama,” says Rodrigo. “I remember feeling so seen: she's taking this normal experience that we all go through and turning it into something really beautiful and artful. I always wanted to write a record like that, but never felt like I had that normal life experience.”



Rodrigo performing on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon in February. Photograph: NBCU/Getty

Then normal life – that pesky shattered heart – intruded. “It’s interesting, heartbreaks when you’re 16 or 17,” says Rodrigo, “because you don’t yet have that perspective of knowing that life goes on and you’re gonna meet other people; that it wasn’t the only happy experience you’ll ever have.” She recounts a day on set where the cast was filming “a really poppy, happy dance number”. Between takes, she was squirrelled away with her acoustic guitar, writing “this sad-ass song” called Happier, wishing her ex well and admiring his new girlfriend. On the piano-led album version, the verses spill over beautifully; the chorus awkwardly, earnestly strains its crescendo, showing the effort of her beneficence.

Much analysis of Drivers License’s wild success concerned a rumoured relationship between Rodrigo and a male co-star (and the alleged third wheel), which you can read about in asinine detail elsewhere. There is no way the majority of listeners cared about this; the song’s appeal is its musical familiarity and the cinematic lyrics laying out Rodrigo’s eviscerated-but-still-beating heart. (Even her best friend, Bizaardvark co-star Madison Hu – who steered Rodrigo through the breakup in real time – said she only really understood her anguish when she heard it.) And for all the media obsession with gen-Z culture shifts, she is reassuringly traditional: the

eternal lovelorn teenage songwriter. Rodrigo's songwriting also subtly distills the passing of innocence. Her second single, the gleefully accusatory *Deja Vu*, ribbed her ex for repeating their rituals with his new girl (Billy Joel songs, *Glee*) but also acknowledged "everything is all reused". Losing first love, she says, "feels sort of earth-shattering in a way that's obviously heartbreaking but really beautiful, too".

When Rodrigo meets someone new, she always asks if they have any ghost stories: *Sour* is its own collection of them, I suggest. "Oh, I'm literally obsessed with that!" she says effusively. (She is, enjoyably, "literally obsessed" with many things during our conversation, including Dua Lipa – whom she wants to meet at the Brits – Natalie Portman, Winona Ryder and the recording studio.) "I never thought about that but I'm going to use that now! Yeah, I feel like that period of my life is sort of over now, like *dead*," she says with relish. "It's fun to look back on those memories and know that they're not real and happening right now, but you still experienced them."



Rodrigo with Matt Cornett in 2019's *High School Musical: The Musical*. Photograph: Walt Disney Pictures/Allstar

Was the obsession with the supposed relationship drama sexist? She sighs. "I try not to look at it or take that stuff super seriously." But she has noticed "sexist criticism of songwriters like me being told that they only write songs

about boys”. She watched it happen with Swift, her favourite songwriter, “which is just BS in my mind”. She has never understood the argument. “I’m a teenage girl, I write about stuff that I feel really intensely – and I feel heartbreak and longing really intensely – and I think that’s authentic and natural. I don’t really understand what people want me to write about; do you want me to write a song about income taxes? How am I going to write an emotional song about that?”

Sour feels “intrinsically young”, she says; the point was to honour those acute teenage feelings. “Something I’m really proud of is that this record talks about emotions that are hard to talk about or aren’t really socially acceptable especially for girls: anger, jealousy, spite, sadness, they’re frowned-upon as bitchy and moaning and complaining or whatever. But I think they’re such valid emotions.” The seven songs I hear are also rife with deep insecurity: Rodrigo brutally comparing herself with the new girlfriend, defeated by a boy’s impossible standards, scrolling social media and feeling sick with envy.

Obviously, beauty and success aren’t everything, but it shows how absurdly poisonous social media is that the pretty, accomplished Rodrigo feels that way. “I think there’s a lot of strength in saying: I don’t know anything and I feel so insecure and unwanted,” she says. “If I were a younger person looking up to my favourite songwriter, I’d be really moved by that so I hope I can provide that.” Rodrigo is Filipino American, which created another point of comparison. “It’s hard for anyone to grow up in this media where it feels like if you don’t have European features and blond hair and blue eyes, you’re not traditionally pretty. I felt that a lot – since I don’t look exactly like the girl next door in all these movies, I’m not attractive. That actually took me a while to shake off. It’s something I’m still shaking off now.”

She has been online much less post-Drivers License. “You can create your own reality sometimes with social media,” she says. “What you see just becomes your reality, and it’s totally not at all.” On the cacophonous *Jealousy, Jealousy*, she sings, “I think I think too much about kids who don’t know me”. To cope, now that she’s more open to criticism than ever, she remembers her mum’s words: “Those who matter don’t mind, and those who mind don’t matter.”

Really, though, Rodrigo is her own worst critic. She started meeting labels about a solo deal in early 2020, after a song she had written for HSM, All I Want, went viral on TikTok and charted respectably. Then aged 17, she wasn't patronised by label executives, she says: the opposite. "People tell you things they think you want to hear. I really appreciate honest opinions and people who won't compliment me in order to get what they want." She chose Interscope/Geffen because the CEO praised her songwriting, not her potential star quality. "I want to be a songwriter," she says. "I don't want to be the biggest pop star that ever lived." (Inspired by Swift's fight to own her music, Rodrigo has retained control of her master recordings.)

Rodrigo became wary of praise at Disney. "From a younger age, I would get insecure because I felt like people weren't being honest with me. I started to have that voice in my head being like: 'That's not good enough, don't listen to them', so I swung the opposite way of thinking everything I do is bad." Writing music alone made "that pendulum reach equilibrium again". She made most of Sour with Daniel Nigro, the first producer she tried out with who told her a song wasn't good enough. ("I think that's a testament to really caring about the music and the artist.") She originally planned to release an EP called Sour, then decided it didn't showcase the extent of her abilities and told Geffen she wanted to make an album. "They were like: 'All right girl, if you think you can do it'," she says. So she worked 13-hour days, seven days a week to finish it.

['We have to nurture each other': how Olivia Rodrigo and Gen Z reinvented the power ballad](#)

[Read more](#)

One side of Sour is about turning on yourself, Rodrigo says. "As a younger child, I was confident almost to the point of being vain!" (There's brilliant footage of her on YouTube as an eight-year-old singing Mötley Crüe.) "I remember turning 16, 17 and suddenly having all these doubts about myself and where I sit in the world and if people liked me. That felt like a distinct souring of that relationship." She is trying to remember that doing her best is enough. She started therapy partially because of the breakup, and has been working on prioritising herself instead of trying to fix someone else, a recurring lyrical theme. "It has to come from you first: an empty pitcher can't pour."

Rodrigo's parents – Mum a teacher, Dad a family therapist – don't pressure her, she clarifies: they are proud, but they'd be proud whatever. They lived in Temecula, California. She pushed to attend auditions. An only child, she calls her parents her "BFFs" and has never rebelled. "I've always been a real goody two-shoes. My music can be my form of teenage rebellion. There's songs that are so angsty and intense."



Photograph: Grant Spanier

Some Disney stars revolt as soon as they're out the door; others come to terms with how it affected them years later. Does she feel looked after by them? "Oh, ho ho ho, these are hot topics," Rodrigo says playfully, then pauses. She skirts the question, worried that she might "get my foot in my mouth" and upset people. She is committed to HSM for two more years, which will make for a challenging parallel career. "You're telling me," she says. She wants to focus on music. "I think it's really hard to split time between the two and there are very few artists who do that efficiently, because acting is based on being a good liar and presenting a version of yourself that's believable, and being a songwriter is the complete opposite. It's like, here are all of my deepest, darkest secrets and I want you to know me so personally."

Rodrigo is not sad to leave this part of her life behind. “Resounding no!” she says. Nostalgia isn’t her style. “I always wanted to grow up because I feel you get better with age and figure out who you are. I feel like I get happier as I get older.” She cannot wait to write it into albums, too. “It’s one of my favourite parts about songwriters like Taylor Swift, because you get to grow up with them.”

Rodrigo recently had what she calls a “crash course in adulthood”, turning 18, having the biggest song in the world, finishing her album and moving into her own place within a few weeks. “It’s like a soft move out – my parents are there a lot of the time,” she says, with a kindly eye roll. “But I love being alone. And I love my own solitude.” As she stares down a year that will undoubtedly leave her on first-name terms with the public, you sense it will become a precious commodity.

Olivia Rodrigo’s debut album, Sour, is out on 21 May on Universal.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/may/07/olivia-rodrigo-im-a-teenage-girl-i-feel-heartbreak-and-longing-really-intensely>

10 of the best ...Metronomy

10 of the best summer anthems, picked by Metronomy



Summer loving ... Joe Mount of Metronomy. Photograph: PR Handout

Summer loving ... Joe Mount of Metronomy. Photograph: PR Handout

Chris Rea to Len, Stereolab to Finley Quaye – to celebrate a decade of their classic summer album *The English Riviera*, Metronomy founder Joe Mount shares a sun-soaked playlist

[Leonie Cooper](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 04.00 EDT

As fans celebrate a decade since the release of Metronomy's swaying-palm-trees-and-hazy-beach-party soundtrack *The English Riviera*, we can think of no one more qualified than the band's founder Joe Mount to select 10 great summer bops. Here are his favourite seasonal bangers ...

Chris Rea: Josephine

This represents the more Balearic summer. It's perfect for an Ibiza sundown session – you will have heard it in the background of a roof terrace bar or a beachside cafe. Chris Rea has sort of always been stuck in Christmas, but it's nice that he has this other side to him. If Driving Home for Christmas is the winter equinox, Josephine is the summer equinox.

Dal ft Leah Yeger: Those Days

[The Guide: Staying In – sign up for our home entertainment tips](#)
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It's a song by a new Devon band who manage to capture my own teenage Devonshire summers spent labouring in a fudge pantry and putting £3 of petrol in my car at a time. I'm with Dal: take me back to those days. Pairs well with a BBQ and doob.

Shocking Blue: Send Me a Postcard

There are certain things that happen during summer: one is a barbecue with mates and another is driving somewhere and experiencing free-flowing traffic or traffic jams. This song is for a free-flowing traffic situation, when you're on the open road and everything's going really well.

Finley Quaye: Sunday Shining

I remember hating the ubiquity of this at any sort of Devonshire pub or party I would go to, but time heals all wounds. Now when I hear this song, I think it's quite nice. I guess at the time that it came out, I wasn't as middle-aged as I am now.

Eddie Cochran: Summertime Blues

What I like about this song is that it's an early attempt to capture what it feels like to be young in summer. It's a teenage summer song but what's interesting is that there's a little bit of nuance to it. It's feelgood, but in a weird way.

Len: Steal My Sunshine

I hated this when it came out. I would have been in sixth form and there was a hint of nu-metal in its presentation. I'd just stopped wearing wallet chains, so I felt it was a bit regressive. Now I've realised that it's actually good. The sample's from a disco track [Andrea True Connection's More, More, More].

Stereolab: Ping Pong

It's the embodiment of summer in a song, but lyrically it's all about recessions and economic recovery. It's quite topical; look up the lyrics, it's very informative. It was used in a skateboard video and it was the only song of theirs that I was familiar with for a while.

Bananarama: Cruel Summer

My sister was a very big Bananarama fan back in the day. I remember thinking that this was a bit meatier than some of the other stuff she was listening to, like Kylie. My favourite girl group of all time is probably the Shangri-Las, and of my time, it would be All Saints.

Souls of Mischief: 93 Til Infinity

This was released in September 1993, but it probably reached Devon in May 1995. It's got [an incredibly evocative intro](#). With summer music you can get tied in knots of nostalgia and this song serves that purpose to the extreme, reminding me of long, hot days that possibly never happened.

The Brothers Four: The Green Leaves of Summer

I was chatting to my mum and dad yesterday and they both started singing this. It's a folky song about how summer is a time for ploughing and being by your wife. I only heard it for the first time yesterday, but I've listened to it five times already. It's kind of becoming my song of this summer already.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/may/07/10-of-the-best-summer-anthems-picked-by-metronomy>.

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2021.05.07 - Opinion

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- Why social care reform in England isn't on the agenda for this Tory government
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[OpinionPolice](#)

**Away from TV's Line of Duty the police
have a long, tawdry history of
corruption**

[Simon Jenkins](#)



Without transparent and independent oversight, every organisation ultimately proves vulnerable to the lure of money



Searching for 'H': DI Kate Fleming (Vicky McClure) and DI Steve Arnott (Martin Compston) in the last series of Line of Duty. Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/PA

Searching for 'H': DI Kate Fleming (Vicky McClure) and DI Steve Arnott (Martin Compston) in the last series of Line of Duty. Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/PA

Fri 7 May 2021 02.00 EDT

As a young journalist, I remember looking across the news desk one night at a row of brown envelopes awaiting a messenger. Each was addressed to a central [London](#) police station. It was, apparently, for the “police benevolent fund” and was for “tip-offs”. But tip-offs of what? I was shocked.

[Undercover officer 'rose to top of campaign group he infiltrated'](#)
[Read more](#)

I am shocked no more. The climax of this week's television bonanza of police corruption was not “Who was H?” in [Line of Duty](#). It was the three-part documentary on BBC2 called [Bent Coppers](#). It was the more gripping because it was not fiction, it was a documentary. But the message was the same as Line of Duty's: no one in charge of the police really cared about corruption.

Bent Coppers told the story of London's Metropolitan and City of London police in the 1960s and 70s. They took money from crooks almost from bottom to top. The source of payments was initially vice, pornography and bank robberies. Then, after the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, the growth of the illicit drugs market led to corruption exploding.

The police was host to “a firm within a firm”. [Police](#) were secretly recorded boasting to criminals, “We've got more villains than you ... The biggest gangsters in Soho are the police ... Everybody deserves ‘a drink’”. The firm had “people” in every borough. Money was handed to junior constables in lifts to keep them quiet. The City police seemed the worst, with regular bank robberies, and even a murder, never leading to arrest or imprisonment. Political oversight was zero.

When [Robert Mark](#) was brought in to clean up the Met, in 1972, he decided he should wind up the “[routinely corrupt](#)” CID. Yet the force was being eulogised nightly by the BBC in Dixon of Dock Green and Z-Cars. When an

appalled public challenged Mark, he simply said: “It will stop bank robberies.” It largely did. He later described the Met as having “long been involved in more routine wrongdoing than the other police forces in England and Wales together” [Mark’s memoirs]. Attacks on him – including from CID-friendly journalists – were so fierce he needed public backing from home secretaries Jim Callaghan and Roy Jenkins.

Anyone familiar with law enforcement knows that bad laws make for rotten policing. Vice laws simply meant massive payouts to police. Drugs laws meant that to increase arrests, the police simply planted drugs, especially on black people. They spawned an increasingly lethal gangland. I recall two obvious dealers at a drugs liaison meeting in Stepney Green, east London, shouting at me: “We love our police. You just keep out of our place.” This was long after the reformers claimed to have sacked or “retired” 500 corrupt London police.

Now we have the continuing revelations of the “spy cops” saga. A reputed [139 policemen](#) were deputed to infiltrate hundreds of political groups through the Special Demonstration Squad. Its “undercover” methods were so outrageous that a senior source admitted it had lost its “[moral compass](#)”. Yet it reflected a sense of a police culture operating way beyond the bounds of public accountability.

The London police were – and, I understand, in large part still are – like an ancient Italian city state, awash with private armies each loyal to itself alone. There is the VIP protection squad, the firearms squad, the fraud squad, the drug squad, the paramilitary territorial support group and mysterious undercover operations galore. Last week, I saw two policemen sauntering nonchalantly through Mayfair’s Shepherd Market proudly sporting submachine guns. Could this be London?

The result is inevitable. Crime dramas used to end with the forces of law and order winning as the good guys. Not any more. In [Line of Duty](#) even the good guys have to be just a little corrupt. In Bent Coppers, the bosses all survived or left to live in Spain. Those who tried to call them to account had their careers ruined. The documentary was a terrible advertisement for whistleblowing.

We are told that policing in a democracy is a unique vocation. Since the days of Robert Peel, the right to deprive one's fellow citizens of their freedom relies not just on law but on a clear moral code. That in turn demands a fierce loyalty from its members. But what was staggering both in Bent Coppers and Line of Duty was the complete absence of political accountability. No one was in charge. Not a politician put in an appearance.

The police seemed sufficient unto themselves, making money out of crime. The City of London police's third-in-command in the 1980s, Hugh Moore, was [described](#) on air as "the greatest villain unhung". He was never brought to justice. Worse, his wholly corrupt force, which should at once have been disbanded and merged with the Met, remained in operation – and still does.

I am sure we shall be told that everything is different now. But the message of these programmes is serious. They risk a collapse in public confidence in the police. That can be restored only when the various forces are brought under transparent democratic control. They should never be firms within firms or armies within armies. They need standing oversight commissions under elected leadership. At present, their only accountability is to the television screen.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/07/tv-line-of-duty-police-history-corruption-money>.

[Opinion](#)**Social care**

Why social care reform in England isn't on the agenda for this Tory government

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The new health bill has no dedicated plan to end the postcode lottery because there's no political capital in doing so



‘On Queen’s speech day, look to see if Matt Hancock is still sporting his ‘care’ badge.’ Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

‘On Queen’s speech day, look to see if Matt Hancock is still sporting his ‘care’ badge.’ Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Fri 7 May 2021 03.00 EDT

[Gunboats to Jersey](#) on election day? Nothing better illuminates the Gilbert and Sullivan-esque style of our prime minister. But, despite stunts, these were *local* elections in England, where most services are – or aren’t – delivered.

From bins to parks, potholes to police, for safe or squalid surroundings, most quality-of-life services are controlled locally, not at Westminster – and by far the biggest is social care, eating up [more than half](#) of councils’ budgets. Yet care is invisible to most voters. When families do suddenly encounter it – frantic parents of a child with special needs, or a family needing care for a parent with dementia – they are shocked to find a threadbare postcode lottery of erratic services. Many voters who cast ballots on Thursday know [virtually nothing about social care](#), blindly assuming it’s like the NHS, until they need it – and most won’t.

That's why no dedicated plan for social care in England – it's a devolved responsibility – will feature in the Queen's speech next Tuesday. Yet again the government calculates that not enough voters benefit to be worth spending the many billions it would take to put this right. Expect the Queen to make yet another breezy promise of a white paper: the Future Social Care Coalition, comprising every interested body, was dismayed to [receive a letter](#) from the chief secretary to the Treasury telling them he would “bring forward proposals for reform next year” – or some time never, more likely. If Johnson bestrides the political scene, he can forget his [Downing Street podium promise](#) to “fix the crisis in social care once and for all with a clear plan we have prepared”.

Plans were bouncing to and fro in Downing Street until last month, but the chancellor's austerity won out: the Telegraph reports that the Treasury [hopes](#) to “kill the whole thing altogether”. Expect this to be the dismal pattern for most post-Covid spending.

Besides, the only plan that interested Johnson was a pledge that no one should lose their home to pay for care costs. But the immediate emergency is less loss of inheritances than lack of any care at all: last year Age UK [reported](#) 2,000 frail, old people a day had been refused care when asking for help during the previous year.

Care ranges from highly profitable top-end homes owned by hedge funds in tax havens to small family businesses going bust as fees for state-funded care are too low. Care workers' abysmal pay means there are [100,000 vacancies](#).

But only the lost inheritances concern the Conservatives, ever since David Cameron commissioned a report back in 2011 from Andrew Dilnot – he recommended limiting to £35,000 what people in England should pay before the state picked up the bill. But that would only subsidise rather than solve the problem of cost: Dilnot was not asked how to find the funds to repair the service itself. The law was [passed, but never enacted](#), costing too many billions for George Osborne's austerity.

There's almost something comical, if it weren't tragic, about this government's social policy ignorance. The story is that when the NHS was

recently asked to model the effect of implementing Dilnot, this “levelling up” government was dismayed to find the 200,000 families a year that would benefit most would be those in the [top wealth quintile living in the south-east](#). It didn’t take a genius to work that out. No wonder the government has no plan for all the contradictions implied by “levelling up”.

Don’t hold your breath for genuine social care reform. Expect only bungs to stop councils collapsing under the strain in this autumn’s comprehensive spending review. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says the last budget delivered [8% cuts to most departments](#): councils yet again will be forced to wield the Treasury’s axe.

Here’s why this government – like others – will never produce a comprehensive social care plan: for them, every option is a political or financial stinker. Make everyone pay more tax? That means the property-less young subsidising the property-rich old. Make the old with funds pay a lump sum or a lien on their home on retirement? They damned that as a “death tax”. Make everyone – or just the over-40s – pay care insurance? Earnings are already stagnant. They could create a national care service, putting councils back in charge of the chaotic array of agencies and care homes outsourced under Margaret Thatcher, but that’s a huge re-nationalisation. None of these look compelling when Ipsos Mori [shows](#) care remains low in public concerns. In the coming austerity, why not keep those billions for eye-catchers with more political bang for the buck?

On Queen’s speech day, look to see if Matt Hancock, the health secretary, is still sporting his “care” badge. The speech is expected to include a bill to try to recover a united NHS from the chaos caused by Andrew Lansley’s 2012 Act, which blew it into fragments. The bill’s architect, the [departing Simon Stevens](#), head of NHS England, is trying to obliterate competition and tendering to create an integrated care system everywhere to combine hospitals, GPs, community services – and social care. But the bill will not legally bind in councils; without a social care plan, that’s impossible, so that jeopardises the whole idea. In name only is Matt Hancock in charge of the Department of Health *and Social Care*. In practice, the two will stay as divided as ever, until some government some time is brave enough to grasp the nettle.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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[First Dog on the Moon](#) Vaccines and immunisation

I'm booked in to get my first dose of the Covid vaccine and truth be told I'm a bit nervous

[First Dog on the Moon](#)



But what is important is getting on top of Covid. What is important is other people!

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OpinionMuseums

Decolonising museums isn't part of a 'culture war'. It's about keeping them relevant

[Dan Hicks](#)

Let's be open to the idea of returning stolen cultural objects, and remaking international relationships with honesty



'Britain's museums sorely need revitalisation, and the question of human remains and artefacts offers a position from which to see debates around them in a clearer light.' The V&A, London, December 2020. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

'Britain's museums sorely need revitalisation, and the question of human remains and artefacts offers a position from which to see debates around them in a clearer light.' The V&A, London, December 2020. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Fri 7 May 2021 05.30 EDT

The dead don't bury themselves. This is one of the first lessons that every student of archaeology must learn. A grave is never evidence of some Pompeii moment, a freeze-frame of someone as they were in life. It shows how that person was treated in death and by posterity.

This was thrown into relief with the publication of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's [report](#) on historical inequalities in commemoration. Entrenched prejudices, preconceptions and pervasive racism of contemporary imperial attitudes, the document explains, led to hundreds of thousands of instances of the unequal commemoration or non-commemoration of African, Asian, Middle Eastern and Caribbean people who fought for Britain in the first and second world wars. Claire Horton, director general of the commission, [responded](#), "We will act to right the wrongs of the past." "I welcome the fact that the commission ... will make amends wherever possible," [chimed in](#) the prime minister.

As the report was published, in the US a national debate about the human remains of Black people – in the context of not war memorials but the storerooms of museums – was gathering momentum. In July 2020, the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology apologised for its "unethical possession" of more than [1,300 skulls](#) assembled by Samuel George Morton in the century for the pseudo-science of [craniometry](#). Then, in mid-February, a report by doctoral student Paul Wolff Mitchell [revealed](#) that the Morton collection includes the grave-robbled skulls of 14 African Americans – dug up in the 1840s from a burial ground adjacent to the site on which Penn Museum now stands.

The ethical treatment of human remains is hardly a new topic, but as this debate has [spread](#) to Harvard and [Princeton](#), it's clearly one where public dialogue is quickly shifting. When Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum (where I work) reopened after the first lockdown in September 2020, all human remains were [removed from display](#), and the famous "Treatment of Dead Enemies" case was dismantled. That 100-year-old exhibit promoted the racist myth that "headhunting" represents a coherent type of "savage" culture, while suggesting that the purpose of a "world culture" museum is to display what was taken from opponents of the British Empire.

Since the 1990s, the return of human remains has become a normal part of curatorial practice in UK museums. London's Natural History Museum [returned](#) the human remains of 37 Indigenous people to South Australia's Narungga community in March 2019. But this is a tiny proportion of what is held. Precise numbers are hard to come by, and little progress has been made since 2003, when a [scoping exercise](#) undertaken for the Ministerial Working Group on Human Remains indicated that England's museums contain the remains of more than 60,000 people across 132 institutions, including perhaps 18,000 from overseas.

Questions about human skulls, bones, and specimens of hair and skin have gradually expanded to encompass ancestral cultural objects taken under colonialism. Today, restitution is as likely to involve artefacts as human remains. In November 2019 Manchester museum [returned](#) 43 secret ceremonial Indigenous Australian items. Mangubadijarri Yanner, representing the Gangalidda Garawa Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, [observed that](#) this return was “important and necessary for the purpose of cultural revitalisation – because locked deep within these items is our lore; our histories, our traditions and our stories”.

Britain's museums sorely need such cultural revitalisation right now, and the question of human remains and artefacts offers a position from which to see debates around museums in a clearer light. Some may seek to marginalise these acts of transparency, return and repair, or to denigrate museum colleagues seeking to advance professional ethical practice, dismissing them as “activists”.

The outdated view persists that curators should restrict themselves to writing history while keeping collections preserved in amber. There's a palpable nostalgia among some board members, directors, and museum friends' associations for the reassuring voice of curatorial authority. For evidence of how that particular ship has sailed, consider the [swift backtracking](#) on [plans](#) to impose a chronological structure on the art and design collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. This [retrograde step](#) would have integrated sub-Saharan Africa and its diasporas into the Asian department, redolent, as craft historian and author Tanya Harrod points out, of a “west and the rest” framing.

The conservative position is that to “decolonise is to decontextualise”. But anti-racism in museums isn’t about pretending that colonialism never happened. It begins with not pretending any longer that colonialism and its consequences are wholly in the past. Some of Britain’s colonial-era museums may try to keep on simply displaying, narrating, and thus reinscribing histories of dispossession, violence and atrocity. Others will be open to dismantling colonial infrastructure where it’s making outdated worldviews and institutional racism endure. Sometimes the context changes without you.

Acting to right wrongs in the treatment and commemoration of the dead is not unpatriotic or iconoclastic, but an urgent task of truth and repair among the living. For museums, this demands a new openness to transformation, driven by equitable partnerships with the audiences, stakeholders and communities that museums serve, and from whom they derive social legitimacy. At present, the gap between London’s largest national museums and those people with the closest ties to world culture collections, both internationally and in the city, is widening. How can this gap be addressed?

One precedent here is how professional standards for managing and caring for Britain’s historic built environment have evolved over the past three decades. Values-led conservation decision-making is [displacing](#) entrenched, elitist art-historical accounts of value based on connoisseurship and the architectural canon, with approaches that centre the significance invested by people in the places that they love. We need this ethos in our museums, replacing hierarchy and traditional authority with civic values driving change. Museums have transformed themselves before, for instance, through free access. In these changed times, how can we address what Arts Council England’s Let’s Create strategy document [names](#) as its investment principles of “inclusivity and relevance”?

Let’s be transparent about the tens of thousands of human remains taken under colonialism that languish in our museum storerooms. Let’s be open to the return of stolen cultural objects, remaking international relationships with credibility and honesty. Let’s dismantle structures of inequality, exclusion and racism where these endure from the colonial era in our institutions. These aren’t iconoclastic attacks on museums, as some will

claim, or part of some “[culture war](#)”. They are overdue measures to keep Britain’s global museums in step with an ever-changing world.

- Dan Hicks is professor of contemporary archaeology at the University of Oxford and author of *The Brutish Museums*

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OpinionCoronavirus

India is hiding its Covid crisis – and the whole world will suffer for it

[Ankita Rao](#)

Modi's government had a choice between saving lives and saving face. It has chosen the latter



Workers cremate people who have died of Covid-19 at a crematorium outside Siliguri on Tuesday. Epidemiologists believe the country's reported death toll is only a fraction of the true figure. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Workers cremate people who have died of Covid-19 at a crematorium outside Siliguri on Tuesday. Epidemiologists believe the country's reported death toll is only a fraction of the true figure. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Thu 6 May 2021 06.17 EDT

A few years ago, as Narendra Modi came into power, I worked on an [investigative report](#) about India hiding its malaria deaths. In traveling from tribal Odisha to the Indian national health ministry in New Delhi, my colleague and I watched thousands of cases disappear: some malaria deaths, first noted in handwritten local health ledgers, never appeared in central government reports; other malaria deaths were magically transformed into deaths of heart attack or fever. The discrepancy was massive: India reported 561 malaria deaths that year. Experts predicted the actual number was as high as 200,000.

[India's neighbours close borders as Covid wave spreads across region](#)
[Read more](#)

Now, with Covid [ravaging the country](#), desperate Indians have taken to Twitter to ask for oxygen cylinders or beg hospitals for an open bed. The crisis has been exacerbated by the government's concealment of critical information. Between India's long history of hiding and undercounting illness deaths and its much more recent history of restraining and suppressing the press, Modi's administration has made it impossible to find accurate information about the virus's hold in the country. Blocking that information will only hurt millions within the country. It will also stymie global efforts to stop the Covid-19 pandemic, and new variants of the virus, at India's border.

Epidemiologists in India and abroad estimate that the country's official reported Covid-19 death toll – around [222,000](#) at time of publication – accounts for only a fraction of the real number. The director of the US-based Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation has estimated that India is only detecting [3-4%](#) of actual cases. Other experts point to total excess deaths in cities such as Mumbai as proof that there could be [60% to 70%](#) more deaths from Covid-19 than the government is admitting to.

There are various reasons India could be cooking the books on Covid deaths. For one, the utter failure of the public health system makes it difficult to account for the millions of bodies passing through hospitals, clinics and those dying in their own home. Despite having become one of the largest economies in the world, Indian state and federal governments [spend a dismal](#)

[amount on healthcare](#), with an investment of less than 1% of its GDP, one of the lowest rates in the world.

But systemic failure is only one part of the puzzle. The reigning party of the Indian government touted its success in curbing the virus very early in the pandemic, and has never let go of that narrative. As bodies burned in funeral pyres across Uttar Pradesh in April, Yogi Adityanath – the state’s chief minister and a key Modi lackey – [claimed](#) that everything was under control and repeatedly refused to announce new lockdown measures, even as he himself contracted Covid-19.

This denialist rhetoric is occurring at almost every level. Like India’s see-no-evil approach to malaria or tuberculosis, its Covid obfuscation suppresses “bad news” in order to buoy the country’s international image and the government party’s domestic standing. Not all countries with struggling health systems do this. Some actually at times overcount deaths from other viruses in order to get more humanitarian aid. But *undercounting* disease is, in many ways, far more sinister. Modi’s government had a choice between saving face and saving lives, and has chosen mass death.

India's Covid obfuscation suppresses 'bad news' to buoy its image and the government party’s domestic standing

While undercounting disease is a longstanding problem in India, the assault on press freedom is far more recent. Since Modi came into power in 2015, the freedom of India’s expansive media culture [has dramatically shrunk](#), according to sources including Reporters Without Borders. In the last few years, the government has sued or prosecuted several news organizations and [journalists](#), citing defamation or other even more dubious rationales. Controversial laws such as the 2000 [Information Technology Act](#) allow for what seem like increasingly frequent, and grossly arbitrary and politically motivated, crackdowns on freedom of speech and press.

Indian journalists tell me they are often asked to self-censor their reporting on the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as what they say on social media, for fear of inciting the ire of the government. Many were understandably incensed last week when the Indian central government reportedly made [Twitter](#) and

[Facebook](#) remove posts critical of the government's Covid measures. Meanwhile, India continues to be one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists to work, and more than 165 journalists have [allegedly died](#) of Covid-19 while covering the crisis itself. (Last month Kakoli Bhattacharya, an Indian journalist who worked as a news assistant for the Guardian, [died](#) of Covid.) In the absence of trustworthy Covid information from their own government, Indians are mostly reliant on social media and foreign reporting for the story of what's actually happening.

The result is a public health nightmare for India – and also, I fear, for the global community, which, just as many countries are breathing a sigh of relief, could face another Covid wave that includes new variants. We can learn from other epidemics what that might look like: India was one of the last countries to eradicate polio, and is one of 15 countries that still have a significant number of people with [leprosy](#). India also has the [third largest](#) HIV/Aids epidemic in the world. India's struggles with diseases that have been eradicated or largely ameliorated elsewhere leaves a backdoor for global public health threats and costs billions of dollars in disease burden. These health crises also harm international travel, trade and other economic indicators, creating new challenges not only for India but for its allies, as well.

India likes to tout itself as the world's largest democracy – and use that moral authority to protect its standing in the global economy and the international diplomatic community. But with a dark curtain separating the reality of the country's Covid-19 crisis from the rest of the world, India's standing and authority are at risk. If the country continues to choose political expediency over transparency in the days to come, the people of India, scrambling to protect their families, are the first victims, but far from the last.

- Ankita Rao is a news editor at the Guardian US
 - This article was amended on 6 May 2021 to clarify that government spending on healthcare in India is less than 1% of GDP.
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2021.05.07 - Around the world

- ['Assassination attempt' Maldives' first democratic president, Mohamed Nasheed, sustains shrapnel wounds in bomb attack](#)
- [Mozambique insurgency 20,000 still trapped near gas plant six weeks after attack](#)
- [US Capitol police condemned by states for January attack failures, emails show](#)
- [South Korea Belgian envoy's wife questioned over Seoul boutique assault claims](#)
- [Barclays Activist Edward Bramson ends battle by selling stake](#)

Maldives

Former Maldives president recovering from shrapnel wounds after bomb attack

Investigation underway after what foreign minister describes as ‘cowardly attack’ on Mohamed Nasheed



Police officers cordon off the scene of the explosion in which Mohamed Nasheed was injured. Photograph: Mohamed Sharuhaan/AP

Police officers cordon off the scene of the explosion in which Mohamed Nasheed was injured. Photograph: Mohamed Sharuhaan/AP

Agence France-Presse in Malé

Fri 7 May 2021 00.09 EDT

Mohamed Nasheed, who was the first democratically elected president of the [Maldives](#) and current parliamentary speaker, was recovering in hospital

on Friday after an assassination attempt left him with shrapnel wounds.

Nasheed was hurt when a device attached to a motorcycle was detonated as he got into a car on Thursday evening, an official said. “Nasheed escaped an assassination attempt,” a Maldivian government official told Agence France-Presse. “He is injured, but his condition is stable.”

Images on social media showed a destroyed motorbike at the scene of the attack.

Armed police and security forces cordoned off the area in the capital, Male, where the attack took place, and the Maldivian parliament, which was in recess, called an emergency meeting following the attack.

President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, a close ally of Nasheed, said an investigation was under way as officials rushed to denounce the targeted attack on the country’s second most powerful figure.

“Strongly condemn the attack on Speaker of Parliament, President Mohamed Nasheed this evening. Cowardly attacks like these have no place in our society,” foreign minister Abdulla Shahid said in a tweet. “My thoughts and prayers are with President Nasheed and others injured in this attack, as well as their families.”

A family member said Nasheed had sustained several wounds. “They have put him under anaesthesia. There is a deeper cut on one of his arms,” the family member said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The relative said Nasheed was responsive and spoke to doctors as he was admitted with shrapnel injuries. One of his bodyguards was also taken to hospital.

The Indian Ocean nation of 330,000 Sunni Muslims is best known around the world for its luxury holiday resorts popular with honeymooners, but it suffers from regular political turmoil.

The government has cracked down on extremism and preaching is highly regulated, but violent attacks have been rare. However, a dozen foreign tourists were wounded by a bomb blast in Male in 2007.

Nasheed rose to become the Maldives' first democratically elected leader in 2008 in the country's first multi-party elections after 30 years of autocratic rule.

Nasheed is a former Amnesty International prisoner of conscience after being sentenced to 13 years in prison in 2015 on terrorism charges criticised as politically motivated by civil rights groups.

But the pro-democracy pioneer is maybe best known internationally for holding a 2009 underwater cabinet meeting to highlight the threat of global warming, signing documents as officials wore scuba gear against a backdrop of coral reefs.

“What we are trying to make people realise is that the Maldives is a frontline state. This is not merely an issue for the Maldives but for the world,” he said at the time.

He resigned three years later after protests against his rule and has failed to reclaim the presidency despite several attempts. Instead, he secured the position of parliamentary speaker in 2019, retaining his influence in political life.

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Global development

Mozambique insurgency: 20,000 still trapped near gas plant six weeks after attack

People fleeing militant violence near Total's Afungi project in Cabo Delgado have been blocked by government forces



Mozambique soldiers on the streets of Palma. Isis-linked al-Shabaab has withdrawn from the town but the group is still active in the suburbs, burning houses and attacking local people. Photograph: João Relvas/EPA

Mozambique soldiers on the streets of Palma. Isis-linked al-Shabaab has withdrawn from the town but the group is still active in the suburbs, burning houses and attacking local people. Photograph: João Relvas/EPA

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[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 02.15 EDT

More than 20,000 Mozambicans have been [trapped near a huge natural gas project](#) in the country's Cabo Delgado province, more than a month since it was abandoned after a militant attack.

People camped at the gates of French energy company Total's Afungi site have had been unable to escape, despite fears of imminent violence, and have limited food because the Mozambican government has blocked humanitarian access.

Total evacuated their staff immediately after Isis-affiliated group al-Shabaab – which is not linked to the Somali group of the same name – attacked the nearby port town of Palma on 24 March, killing dozens of people. It withdrew soon afterwards but has been [burning houses in suburbs](#) around Palma and attacking fishers, including beheading some, according to Cabo Ligado, a weekly report on violence in the area.

There are fears militants will launch a large scale attack again [after Ramadan](#) finishes next week.

In late April, Total declared a [“force majeure”](#) to suspend its operations in the Afungi site.

Mozambican forces control Quitunda village, just north of Palma, built to relocate communities displaced by Total’s multibillion-dollar liquified natural gas (LNG) project, but have not let civilians leave the area. Many people from outlying villages and from Palma sought refuge in Quitunda. The UN refugee agency said on Friday that people trying to evacuate by boat had been physically assaulted.

[About 40,000 people had fled](#) on foot or by bus, and the World Food Programme said it had been working to get food to them. But it had been unable to reach people stuck in Quitunda and Palma because it would not agree to government demands to distribute the aid itself.



An image taken from a video released by militants on 29 March 2021, purporting to show fighters near the town of Palma. Photograph: AMAQ/AP

Several humanitarian organisations working in Cabo Delgado said they could not officially comment on humanitarian access in the area, though they have been providing aid elsewhere in the region.

Zenaida Machado, [Mozambique](#) researcher at Human Rights Watch, said that despite the withdrawal of al-Shabaab, there were fears of more fighting

between government forces and militants. She said shops and infrastructure in Palma had been destroyed by the fighting and dead bodies were lying in the streets, despite the army claiming it was in control of the situation.

“People resorted to looting abandoned shops and selling everything they had so they could feed themselves or pay the boat fare to take them to another place. People told us in some cases they had to give money to army soldiers to get on planes,” she said.

She said the government’s failure to help people evacuate had been a feature of the conflict. One option for those trapped has been to hide in nearby mangroves where occasionally boats arrive, but at about \$30 (£22), the fee to board can often be too much.

“We have heard of women walking for 10 days alone with babies on their back, of people walking through the bush, of people sleeping days in the mangroves with their whole body in the water to hide from the insurgents,” she said.

“We have heard all types of stories but what we have not heard is where the security forces [have been] in all of that period.”

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network’s [April report](#) said those travelling through forests looking for safety or in hiding had no food or water.

Joseph Hanlon, a development lecturer specialising in Mozambique at the UK’s Open University, said the Palma attack could be following a pattern of repeated attacks to clear out local people that led to militants [seizing the nearby port town Mocímboa da Praia last year](#). He said the army’s response may be to control movement to block this tactic.

“The problem is they have no way to feed these people. Quitunda has no water system. When it rains, tanks fill up and people drink from them. So people there now are living from the local people’s water supplies,” he said.



Displaced women with their children shelter in Pemba after fleeing attacks in Palma. Photograph: AP

The militants have been gaining ground in the area for months. Small-scale attacks at the end of last year led Total to suspend work at Afungi until it was promised a security cordon. The \$20bn (£15bn) LNG project, due to be completed by 2024, was about to restart when the Palma attack happened.

Major gas and gemstone discoveries in Cabo Delgado a decade ago [transformed it](#) from a chronically neglected region to one the government is desperate to maintain control of.

But local people feel they have not benefited, and resentment over the area's underdevelopment is thought to have [fuelled the insurgency](#).

[UK support for Mozambique gas plant fuelling conflict – Friends of the Earth](#)

[Read more](#)

Total said that they are not abandoning the Afungi project or the relocation of displaced villagers to Quitunda but with work suspended they “cannot maintain the same level of employment or enter into contractual arrangements for goods and services with suppliers”.

“Mozambique LNG remains committed to [the] delivery of Quitunda village and completion of the resettlement process, however the construction is currently on hold.”

Because militant-controlled Mocímboa da Praia lies immediately south of Palma, displaced people have had to walk long distances to safety, including to the provincial capital Pemba.

According to the UN, [the vast majority of displaced people have been staying with host communities.](#)

Throughout the conflict, which has seen more than 700,000 displaced, families and villagers have provided shelter, leading to dozens of people staying in overcrowded homes.

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US Capitol breach

Capitol police condemned by US states for January attack failures, emails show

Meeting of mayors and police chiefs criticized ‘failed leadership’ as documents reveal insurrection sent ripples through state agencies



The emails show state agencies scrambled to protect their own state capitols from groups who were openly planning to breach them. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

The emails show state agencies scrambled to protect their own state capitols from groups who were openly planning to breach them. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

[Jason Wilson](#)

[@jason_a_w](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 03.00 EDT

A January meeting of mayors and police chiefs of large American cities criticized “failed leadership by Capitol police and a failure to plan” over the rightwing insurrection in Washington on 6 January, according to emails reviewed by the Guardian.

[Explosives and weaponry found at US far-right protests, documents reveal](#)
[Read more](#)

The revelations were contained in an email sent by a senior police officer in Washington state. Additional emails from local, state, and federal agencies sent in January show that following the attack, authorities in Washington state paid increased attention to far-right groups such as QAnon adherents, the Three Percenters and Joey Gibson, the founder of the Vancouver-based street protest group Patriot Prayer.

The emails, provided to the Guardian by the transparency non-profit [Property of the People](#), show how the events of the attack on the Capitol sent ripples around the US, and how agencies in states across the country scrambled to monitor local far-right activists, track down locals wanted for their role in the insurrection, and protect their own state capitols from groups who were openly planning to breach them.

The first email was sent to officers in police departments in cities within Snohomish county, north of Seattle, by Ryan Dalberg, the police lieutenant in Everett, Washington.

The email summarized a “US conference of mayors/major cities police chiefs to discuss the riot at the US Capitol” and “the potential for ongoing civil unrest related to the election outcome and upcoming presidential inauguration”, which the email said the Everett police chief, Dan Templeman, had attended.

Following the comment about “failed leadership”, Dalberg added: “Much of the intel about the number of participants and the potential for violence was available via open-source information, and for whatever reason, the US Capitol police did not appear to be fully prepared for what they encountered.”

Dalberg added that participants had connected the events of 6 January “to domestic terrorism, in that it is both real and perceived grievances that are driving people and groups to take violent and extreme actions”.

Property of the People’s executive director, Ryan Shapiro, said: “The intelligence was there, coming from the agencies and right in the open. Despite ample warning, US Capitol police leadership failed to defend democracy. The question is why.”

Everett police department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Other emails show that even before the Capitol attack, analysts at the Washington State Fusion Center had been keeping close tabs on far-right groups and their plans to occupy that state’s capitol, in Olympia.

On 28 December, Alexandria Forbush, an intelligence analyst at the Fusion Center, sent an email to Stefan Pentcholov, a University of Washington police department detective currently seconded to the Joint Terrorism Task Force based at the FBI’s Seattle field office.

In the email, which she later forwarded to the Washington State Fusion Center director, Curt Boyle, Forbush warns that “Washington 3 Percenters sent out an email calling for action at the Olympia legislative building when the session begins on 11 January”.

The plan outlined in the email was “to crowd all the entrances to the building and gain entrance to the gallery when people enter or exit the building by following after them”. In addition, they said they would be “making every attempt to enter the building – per the constitution. For every person that makes their way through our gauntleted entrances, we will attempt to go right along with them inside.”

Other signs of concern in the wake of the Capitol riot came in the form of an email sent by Pentcholov, the JTTF officer, to Sgt Debra Winsor, who runs the critical infrastructure section of the Washington State Fusion Center, advising of a 23 February lecture at the University of Washington by Joey Gibson.

Gibson, the founder of Patriot Prayer, was the organizer of a long string of confrontational pro-Trump protests in Portland, Oregon, between 2017 and 2020. Many of the protests became violent, and some descended into riots.

In the email, Pentcholov advises that “the same setup applies – indoor venue, 100% ID and weapons check, etc”, adding “local antifa regulars are also aware of the re-scheduled event. There is unconfirmed info that Washington 3%-ers will also attend.”

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[South Korea](#)

Belgian envoy's wife questioned over Seoul boutique assault claims

Two boutique workers allege they were slapped and hit on head in row over shoplifting



A shopping district in Seoul, South Korea. The Belgian ambassador has said he 'sincerely regrets the incident involving his wife'. Photograph: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

A shopping district in Seoul, South Korea. The Belgian ambassador has said he 'sincerely regrets the incident involving his wife'. Photograph: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

Agence France-Presse in Seoul

Fri 7 May 2021 03.59 EDT

Police have questioned the wife of Belgium's ambassador to [South Korea](#) over accusations she hit two boutique staff in a row over shoplifting.

The ambassador, Peter Lescouhier, previously said he “sincerely regrets the incident involving his wife”, adding that he “wants to apologise on her behalf”.

“No matter the circumstances, the way she reacted is unacceptable,” he said.

The woman, named in media reports as Xiang Xueqiu, was questioned on Thursday, said a detective at Yongsan police station in central Seoul, without providing further details.

Reports say the envoy’s wife tried on clothing in the Seoul store before walking out, prompting an assistant to run after her to ask about an item she was wearing and triggering the confrontation.

CCTV footage showed her pulling at one employee’s arm and hitting her on the head, before slapping another worker who tried to intervene across the face.

The video – provided by the family of an alleged victim – was reported widely by local media and circulated online, turning public opinion sharply against the ambassador’s family.

The Belgian embassy issued the ambassador’s apology in a Facebook post as it sought to contain the damage, but its Korean translation sounded heavy-handed, prompting further criticism.

“You are apologising in that tone?” asked a poster on Naver, the country’s largest portal. “Do you really reflect your country’s stature?”

Ambassadors’ wives enjoy diplomatic immunity but the Belgian embassy said she would cooperate with police.

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[Barclays](#)

Activist investor Edward Bramson ends Barclays battle by selling stake

Boss of New York-based Sherborne Investors gives up campaign to overhaul British bank



Edward Bramson's Sherborne Investors says it is selling the stake in Barclays to focus on a new unnamed investment target. Photograph: Sherborne Investors

Edward Bramson's Sherborne Investors says it is selling the stake in Barclays to focus on a new unnamed investment target. Photograph: Sherborne Investors

[Mark Sweney](#) and [Kalyeena Makortoff](#)

Fri 7 May 2021 04.47 EDT

The activist investor Edward Bramson has sold his 6% stake in [Barclays](#), abandoning a three-year battle to overhaul the British bank.

Sherborne Investors, Bramson's New York-based investment vehicle, said it was selling the stake to focus on a new unnamed investment target instead. The move offers some relief to Barclays after a lengthy row with the investor over the lender's business model and its leadership.

The British-born lawyer first took a stake in Barclays in 2018, urging the lender to scale back its underperforming investment bank to focus on its more lucrative consumer operations, [claiming its strategy had failed to benefit shareholders](#).

However, Bramson, who has been described as a corporate raider by critics and a turnaround specialist by fans, has struggled to gain traction with fellow Barclays shareholders, who balked at his efforts to push his way on to the bank's board in 2019, when [fewer than 13% of shareholders voted in favour](#).

He took another run at the bank's leadership in early 2020, calling for the removal of the chief executive, Jes Staley, after it emerged that the banking boss was facing a regulatory investigation over his links to the sex offender and disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein. However, Bramson eased up on demands for Staley's removal last spring in light of the Covid-19 outbreak.

In a letter to investors on Friday, Sherborne said it was taking advantage of the rise in Barclays' share price to exit its position, having seen the stock rise to more than 180p from 73p a year earlier. However, the share price is currently 15% lower than when the fund's position became public.

Sherborne told investors it had joined the boards of five other companies since taking a stake in Barclays, and launched "successful turnarounds at all of them". It said: "Each of these investments returned 100% or more, so it is a pity that the opportunity did not arise to join the board of Barclays to assist in a turnaround with a similar result.

"We think that the new investment will produce better returns and has a clearer prospect of our becoming engaged in an operating turnaround, which is the primary contributor to Sherborne Investors' investment returns."

Shares in Barclays rose 2% on Friday after Bramson's announcement, making the bank one of the top FTSE 100 risers.

The scale of Bramson's stake prior to the sale made him the third-largest shareholder in Barclays, after the investment fund BlackRock and Qatar's sovereign wealth fund.

Guardian business email sign-up

Barclays had been under pressure to bolster profits after Staley's push into investment banking initially failed to significantly boost profits.

Barclays [reported a 30% fall in pre-tax profits in 2020](#), from £4.4bn a year earlier, with earnings hit by a jump in bad debt provisions. However, the bank highlighted the strong performance of its investment bank, which benefited from a jump in trading because of market volatility last year, and corporate fundraising.

The division reported a 35% increase in pre-tax profits to £4bn for the whole of 2020, providing a boost to Staley's strategy to diversify the bank's returns.

In its letter, Sherborne offered some parting words to the bank, which it admitted employed "many good and capable people, and is still an important institution in the United Kingdom".

It said: "Business is not a science and so people of goodwill may, therefore, sometimes differ. In that spirit, Sherborne Investors expresses its most sincere wish that things will turn out well for Barclays, its employees, and its investors."

Barclays declined to comment.

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