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Names in the newsEuro 2020

So, Noddy Holder, here it is summery Christmas!

Rebecca Nicholson



The former Slade singer pushing turkey sandwiches in July and the year-late Euros leave one discombobulated



Slade singer Noddy Holder fronts the summer revival of the Pret Christmas sandwich. Photograph: PinPep/Rex/Shutterstock

Slade singer Noddy Holder fronts the summer revival of the Pret Christmas sandwich. Photograph: PinPep/Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 10 Jul 2021 10.00 EDT

“Christmas? But it’s summer. What’s going on?” Australians might have a different answer to that, but last week Noddy Holder was asking the question from the northern hemisphere. The Slade frontman is heading an ad campaign for a well-known and ubiquitous-in-the-south sandwich chain, which has released its famous [Christmas sandwich in July](#), for a short period, in case anyone felt they missed out on the experience last December.

Holder also handed out free Christmas sandwiches on the streets of Soho, which must have been discombobulating. Hearing Merry Xmas Everybody used to trigger flashbacks to the panpipe version that played on an hourly loop in the department store where I worked as a teenager, but hearing it in July 2021 barely elicited a shrug of the shoulders. For many, last Christmas was make-do and miserable and anxious. If Holder’s unseasonal

opportunism can inject a bit of cheer into what is becoming a make-do and anxious July then, by all means, scream “It’s Christmas!” at top volume.

Also bringing cheer is the football, which is having its own discombobulating effect. Not just because England have made today’s final – watching each match has been a strange case of staunch pessimism slowly transforming into hope, rather than the more familiar reversed format – but because the [Euro 2020](#) branding is everywhere, as if time simply stopped.

Uefa said retaining the Euro 2020 brand would remind people in future of what the world went through last year

Uefa kept the 2020 name despite the suspension of the tournament for a year. They said this was to maintain its “original vision”, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the competition. They pointed out that rebranding would mean the non-eco destruction and recreation of all the merchandise already produced, and that the choice would stand to remind people in the future of what we went through last year. In April 2020, when this decision was announced, it was perhaps a sign of optimism that we would not still be going through it now. Yet here we are.

Whenever I speak to strangers about how their 2020 was, two things are clear. One is that time has become slippery. Nobody is quite sure if it has been a year of disruption and chaos, or two years, or 18 months, or 15 months. Nobody seems able to recognise whether it went quickly or slowly. The other is that “discombobulating” is the perfect word for it: I have heard this word twice in a week, and with Christmas now in July, and 2020 in 2021, the discombobulation continues.

Regency reality TV? Pass the smelling salts

Whenever I see author tat in museum gift shops – those Virginia Woolf socks, that Sylvia Plath fridge magnet – I think, it’s what they would have wanted. Now Jane Austen has inspired a new reality television dating series, [Pride & Prejudice: An Experiment In Romance](#), and clearly, it’s what she would have wanted.



Jane Austen has inspired a new dating show. Photograph: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

The official description promises boat rides and archery against a backdrop of rolling hills, which makes this “ultimate romantic experience” sound like a long weekend at Butlin’s Minehead. “A group of eligible, hopeful suitors will have to win the heart of our heroine, and her court,” it promises. It sounds fantastic, like a cosplay sports day with lust on its mind.

Obviously, if this comes to the UK, I will inevitably add it to the ever-mutating beast of bizarrely formatted dating shows that I can’t stop watching. However, I am tickled by the idea that women are supposed to fantasise about life in Regency England. Is that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in your pocket, or are you just pleased to see me? I’m not one to judge other people’s turn-ons but I look forward to a sexy segment where the suitor assumes complete legal control over his new bride. Pass the smelling salts!

In fantasy land, the period bonkbuster has really, ahem, come into its own in recent times, primarily by being far less coy than most of its ancestors, and throwing accuracy to the wind. This *Experiment In Romance* will surely take its inspiration from the *Bridgerton* dream, rather than the historical reality, but I’m not sure we could handle the latter.

Ross and Marcel join canon of great celebrity feuds



Marcel, left, played by David Schwimmer, with his simian costar.
Photograph: NBC/NBC via Getty Images

Certain famous feuds are legendary and deservedly so: Joan Crawford and Bette Davis; Kanye West and Jay-Z; Mariah Carey and Jennifer Lopez. Last week, a long-running disagreement between David Schwimmer and the performing simians best known for playing [Marcel the monkey](#) on *Friends* came to a head. [Mike Morris](#), the animal trainer in charge of one of the capuchins who appeared as Ross's pet in season one, gave a blistering interview to the *Sun*, in which he called Schwimmer "despicable" for comments made about the monkeys in the recent *Friends* reunion.

Among such avant garde gems as David Beckham declaring himself to be a Monica fan and Justin Bieber appearing as a potato, you may recall Schwimmer saying that working with the monkey was his least favourite part of filming *Friends*. It is not the first time Schwimmer has criticised his animal co-stars but Morris has finally had enough, suggesting that the actor was jealous of the laughs that Katie and Monkey, the monkeys, were getting from the audience. This level of feud, which appears to have been

simmering since 1994, goes above and beyond the call of animosity and deserves a place in the canon of great celebrity beefs.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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The Observer view on Gareth Southgate's England football team

[Observer editorial](#)

Whether they win or lose the final, the manager and squad have united many behind a progressive, inclusive idea of patriotism



Gareth Southgate speaks to his players during extra-time at the England v Denmark Euro 2020 semi-final match at Wembley Stadium on 7 July.
Photograph: Paul Marriott/Rex/Shutterstock

Gareth Southgate speaks to his players during extra-time at the England v Denmark Euro 2020 semi-final match at Wembley Stadium on 7 July.
Photograph: Paul Marriott/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 11 Jul 2021 01.30 EDT

When Gareth Southgate's England team walk out on to the thrilling green Wembley turf at 7.50pm this evening, they will have already won one kind of victory. Over the past few weeks, they have determinedly demonstrated what our ruling politicians have sought raucously to deny: that patriotism doesn't have to be rooted in us-and-them division; that genuine national pride is earned through standards and principles, not bought with flags and fibs. And that the strength of our future lies not in a narrowing nostalgia for a whitewashed past, but rather in celebrating an emphatically inclusive present: "Cry God for Harry, Raheem, Declan, Kalvin, England and St George!"

Southgate took over this job during the fractured political autumn of 2016. He talked then of how he was "[determined to give everything I have](#), to give the country a team that they're proud of and one that they're going to enjoy

watching play and develop". That managerial platitude revealed a couple of the values that he has stood by in the past five years, values mostly neglected on our national stage. The first is a reflexive understanding that the privilege of power should be measured by what you put in, not what you take out; the second lies in that word "develop". Sport is an arena of charged moments and milliseconds but, as Southgate's tenure has shown, its fuller narrative is all about incremental improvement based on sound strategy over months and years.

Genuine national pride is earned through standards and principles, not bought with flags and fibs

After Wednesday's semi-final, the pundit Gary Neville, a former international teammate of the England manager, talked about how "the standards of leaders in this country in the last couple of years have been poor. And looking at that man there, that's everything a leader should be: respectful, humble, telling the truth, genuine." Football matters, of course, because it doesn't matter; but in its minute scrutiny of fraught decision-making there is always a microcosm of wider anxieties. Southgate is faced with a world in which there are 60 million strong opinions – from Roy Keane's to your newly informed granny's – on the efficacy of two holding midfielders, or the optimum role for Jack Grealish. As Neville suggests, he has shown that you can win the trust, even of vehement opponents, by having the courage and decency to stand up and explain your tough decisions in as clear a manner as you are able. Grandstanding and bluffing won't do it; it's not about you.

Tabloid culture has long demanded footballers be role models, not least so that the young millionaires can be exposed when they inevitably fall short. One of Southgate's achievements has been to understand how openness and trust could be brought even to that broken relationship. Rather than garrisoning themselves from the media, his squad has been encouraged to be their authentic selves. As the manager said recently, the days when players took a bus to the ground along with their fans may have gone, but that does not mean that these dedicated young men have not all known struggle and doubt and setback. Marcus Rashford's extraordinary campaigning set the bar for that commitment, but he is far from alone. The heartfelt stories told by

Raheem Sterling or Kalvin Phillips of formidable barriers overcome give proper context to the [taking of the knee](#); the public solidarity of [Jordan Henderson with LGBTQ fans](#) is no empty gesture; they are statements of what courage and togetherness look like.

In the 55 years since [England](#) have contested a significant final, Wembley's great arc of lights has long replaced the twin towers of the old empire stadium. But many of the same qualities that united that fabled [England](#) team of Nobby Stiles and Bobby Moore run through this team too. Southgate's squad has revived the spirit of that old changing-room commitment: "We win together, and we lose together." Let's hope that this time, more than any other time, they can find a way to make it the former.

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The Observer view on 19 July's relaxation of Covid restrictions

[Observer editorial](#)

Abandoning so many controls now is another costly gamble from a prime minister who has forgotten his ‘data, not dates’ pledge



Covid-19 testing site in Uxbridge, London, on Friday: infection rates are rising steeply again in the UK. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Shutterstock

Covid-19 testing site in Uxbridge, London, on Friday: infection rates are rising steeply again in the UK. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Shutterstock

Sun 11 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

It is a mark of how badly this government has misjudged the pandemic response that [Boris Johnson](#) made a pledge in February to focus on “data, not dates” in relaxing social restrictions. We had a right to expect this approach to Covid-19 from the very beginning: it should have been driven by scientific evidence and a sober assessment of competing courses of action. But government decision-making over the past 16 months has been

too driven by cabinet politics and internal party management, and too little by the public health of the nation. Johnson's apparent determination to relax at once a huge swath of Covid control measures on 19 July in spite of steeply rising infection rates, reveals that February pledge as hollow.

The government's argument is that even though data has changed significantly in recent weeks, with the rapid growth of the more infectious and more vaccine-resistant Delta variant, the link between infection and death has been sufficiently weakened by the vaccination programme to allow its self-styled "freedom day" to go ahead. Ministers are right that vaccines have [dramatically cut the risk of death](#) for those contracting the virus: in January, one in 50 infections led to a death; today that figure is just one in 1,000. But there are several important reasons to exercise more caution than the government is showing.

First, a decade of underfunding followed by Covid-19 has left the NHS under the worst strain of its 70-year history. Doctors and NHS chiefs are reporting that the health service is [struggling to cope](#) as it tries to deal with the waiting list backlog caused by the pandemic. The number of Covid hospitalisations is again starting to rise. As infection rates continue to increase, there is a risk that even with a lower proportion of cases resulting in hospitalisation, the sheer number of cases will again overwhelm the NHS, with knock-on impacts for people with life-threatening conditions such as cancer that will go undiagnosed and untreated. [One in 160 people](#) in the UK now have the virus; the government's estimates suggest that Covid cases will reach [more than 100,000 a day](#) soon after restrictions are relaxed.

Second, the impacts of long Covid can be extremely serious, and thousands of people – particularly teenagers and those in their 20s who do not yet have the protection of the vaccine – may end up living with its debilitating symptoms for months as a result of letting Covid spread rapidly through the unvaccinated population. We do not yet know enough about the long-term health impacts of long Covid. Yet its risks do not appear to have featured in the government's calculations about opening up.

Third, there remains little data on the effectiveness of vaccines in the 500,000 immunosuppressed people in the UK. The government has also [not yet issued guidance](#) for the clinically vulnerable, who may end up needing to

shield after 19 July because of relaxed restrictions. This could likely be avoided if relaxation was delayed until more people were vaccinated and population-level immunity was higher.

If the Delta variant had not been seeded so quickly in the UK after Johnson delayed putting India on the red list for international travel for weeks in the spring, the risks of simultaneously relaxing so many restrictions on 19 July would have been lower. England's chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, has indicated that there [may be advantages](#) to opening up in the summer rather than the autumn, when the NHS will be under more pressure. But there are questions as to why the government is not delaying by a few more weeks until more people have received both vaccine doses. At the moment, just over half the population have received both doses; later in the summer that proportion will be significantly higher. This would help dampen the spread of the Delta variant, and reduce the risk of more vaccine-resistant variants developing. The government, instead, appears to be allowing Covid to spread among children and younger groups to build their immunity, rather than rolling out vaccination to 12- to 15-year-olds as some other countries are doing. But the risks of long Covid [in adolescents are unknown](#) and potentially significant.

These decisions involve finely judged assessments of risks and benefits, and a huge degree of uncertainty. Yet Johnson has repeatedly failed to act promptly during the pandemic, with fatal consequences. Moreover, his government has committed to dropping low-harm, low-cost interventions, such as compulsory masks in indoor public spaces, despite evidence that suggests they are [effective in reducing community transmission](#) and the high levels of public support for them. This gives the impression of a government still swayed by Conservative MPs ideologically opposed to masks because they ludicrously regard them as a symbol of curtailed liberty. Johnson's emphasis on personal responsibility suggests he himself is still driven by a distaste for the collective measures needed to control a pandemic, and not enough by scientific evidence and data.

Time and again in this pandemic, Johnson has lifted social restrictions too early or delayed acting. With a virus that spreads exponentially in a population that is not fully vaccinated, the costs of these missteps can be unbearably high. As more and more people get their second vaccine, these

trade-offs continue to shift. If the government goes ahead with relaxing most of the remaining restrictions on 19 July, we can only hope that this time it is a gamble that pays off. The political cost that Boris Johnson will pay if he is wrong will be high. The human cost that we will all pay will be tragic.

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Observer comment cartoon

Euro 2020

The pressure's on the Three Lions – cartoon

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It's a pity not everyone can access the memorial to a struggle for equality

[Rowan Moore](#)



The stone mound to the Peterloo massacre invites people to step up to say their piece, but overlooks wheelchair users



The memorial to the Peterloo massacre, designed by Jeremy Deller.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

The memorial to the Peterloo massacre, designed by Jeremy Deller.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Sun 11 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Peterloo protest

In Manchester, a case of good intentions gone awry. A [memorial](#) was built to the Peterloo massacre of 1819, in which protesters for parliamentary reform were killed by a cavalry charge. It is by the exceptional artist Jeremy Deller and the exceptional architects Caruso St John, respectively winners of the Turner and Stirling prizes, and went through extensive consultations before it was built. It is beautifully crafted out of multicoloured stone from all regions of the UK and is inscribed with the names of victims and the towns and villages from which protesters came.

It takes the form of a circular stepped mound on to which, like protesters wanting to make a declaration, you can climb. Its only problem is that wheelchairs can't go up steps, and disabled campaigners have argued that it is not a great statement about what Deller called "the egalitarian spirit of

Peterloo”, to present the mound as a desirable destination while denying it to a significant section of the population. Manchester city council has now said there is “[no viable solution](#)” to make the memorial accessible and that it will try to do better with future memorials. Some might argue that it will be impossible for artists to do anything, if they have to take all such considerations into account. But, if these thoughtful and skilful people had done so from the start, they might have created a truly powerful work.

An incomplete truth

Much praise has been heaped on the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie for her article [attacking the “sanctimony” and lack of compassion](#) she perceives in social media, in particular from another writer whom she does not name but can be easily identified. Adichie twice writes that this other writer, hostile to her statements on transgender issues, “has asked followers to pick up machetes and attack me”. That sounds bad, except that the tweet from January actually says: “I trust that there are other people who will pick up machetes to protect us from the harm transphobes like Adichie & [JK] Rowling seek to perpetuate. I, however, will be in my garden with butterflies, trying to figure out how to befriend the neighbourhood crows. Find me on the gram [butterfly emoji].” Is this really inciting bloodshed? Does it not contain a note of irony? “Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it, as Jonathan Swift wrote,” said Adichie. Well yes, but would Truth not have been served by citing the whole tweet?

Architect misfires

In my first job in architecture I worked in an office where a Niagara-like roar would make one all too aware that one of the partners was using the poorly installed toilet on the floor above. He seemed never to have learned the etiquette of aiming to the side. But I now find that this man, called Peter Kellow, has worse foibles. He has [been expelled](#) from the Royal Institute of British Architects for writing on Facebook that “there is no such thing as the Jewish race. This is one of the many stunts that Judaists have pulled on non-Judaists who have swallowed it whole”, and that “the liberal elite who rule us like cults as cults aid one of their central objectives – undermining the nation. So Freemasons, Judaists and Sunni Muslims become there [sic]

natural bedfellows.” He was previously expelled from the Architects Registration Board , the body that regulates the profession. “The fact that both [the] ARB and Riba,” said Kellow, “went to the trouble of expelling me demonstrates clearly that my criticisms were right on target.” This talk of targets was, for me, triggering.

Rowan Moore is the Observer’s architecture critic

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The real rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge is how low they can go for money

Catherine Bennett



For despots and plutocrats, the question is which university is the better laundry



Cambridge students take part in the vice chancellor's procession before a graduation ceremony last month. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

Cambridge students take part in the vice chancellor's procession before a graduation ceremony last month. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

Sat 10 Jul 2021 12.30 EDT

As the richer of the two rich universities, Cambridge has largely been spared, until now, the public embarrassment when – as with Oxford – an already affluent institution boasts about donations that would still look dubious even if they could be characterised as important to survival or, say, establishing [meritocratic](#) access to its treasures.

However, Oxford may now, it emerges, have to compete with its old rival for the accolade of being UK academe's top reputational laundromat. Cambridge, too, can soar above principles and, to judge by last week's [headlines](#) about Faustian pacts, may even prove to be more ambitious than Oxford. For while Oxford's vice chancellor, Professor Louise Richardson, was trumpeting the generosity of an [American Trump supporter](#) she had cultivated, or more recently, the benevolence of a [chemicals entrepreneur](#) with a history of tax avoidance and environmental damage, Cambridge's vice chancellor, Professor Stephen Toope, had ideas that now make these bungs look, if not exactly worthy, fractionally less grubby. What, other than

more satirical, is Oxford's ethics centre memorialising a US private equity magnate when compared with Cambridge's proposed deal, reported last week, with the authoritarian UAE leadership?

Maybe that's the point. A truly enterprising vice chancellor might well reflect, on Faustian pact tactics, that the big mistake is always to fritter away the mortal side of the deal, whether it's on pope-baiting or sanitising a billionaire. Why go for a polluter's £100m whitewash if a glittering Cambridge-Beelzebub Institute, plus £400m in funding, can be had at roughly the same sort of reputational cost? Perhaps Richardson should have reached up, like Toope, for the stars. Though admittedly, Sheikh al-Maktoum has a touching Cambridge backstory: he learned English there and the same city reportedly hosted his first abduction of a daughter. Sheikha Shamsa al-Maktoum was kidnapped in 2000, according to allegations that a UK judge described as "of a very high order of seriousness". She has not been seen since.

Actually, it was pure bad luck that new [allegations](#) about the FBI being misled (by the UAE) into collaborating with the capture of the second abductee, Latifa, surfaced on the same day as reports about a potential Cambridge-UAE academic collaboration. That there might be a specifically feminist resistance to this alliance, given women's [enforced subservience](#) in the emirates, is possibly, though not necessarily, acknowledged by the mention in [university documents seen by the *Guardian*](#) of a "values gap".

As for Toope, his willingness to engage with Shamsa and Latifa's abductor is all the more striking given that his name, until last week, was probably most often associated (outside Cambridge) with a passion for young people's wellbeing. While Toope's university was, it turns out, considering an alliance with a country that sentences university lecturers and other critics to years in prisons that are so degrading UN officials recently demanded reform, his university launched a "Report+Support" tool, inviting anonymous accusations of "racism, discrimination and micro-aggressions". Then again, Toope, a human rights lawyer, had previously reconciled his obvious concern for safe spaces – along with what he called a "moral" rejection of fossil fuel investment – with his [pursuit of Chinese funding](#).

Prior to the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre, Toope told Peking University of Cambridge's commitment to China

In 2019, shortly before the 30th [anniversary](#) of the Tiananmen Square massacre, he told an audience at Peking University, having rhapsodised on the beauties of its campus (“particularly in spring when the blossoms begin to bloom on the trees around Weiming Lake!”), about [his university’s commitment to China](#), with its “vastly ambitious Belt and Road Initiative”, its “five pillars” development philosophy. “I was thrilled,” he said, “to discover that the theme of this year’s China Development Forum, to which I am a delegate, is: Greater Opening up for Win-Win Cooperation.”

Of course, this versatile professor may yet confound the many critics of this Cambridge-China entente, with the revelation that his ostensible servility is, in fact, just a slightly crude act, designed to make his hosts think him an idiot of almost unparalleled usefulness. Beneath it, his aim could be to signal to Hong Kong dissidents and to other victims of Chinese state oppression that, among the future benefits of his presence at the Greater Opening up for Win-Win Cooperation event will be, when internet access permits, a local offer along the lines of the “Report+Support” reporting tool, featuring additional categories of censorship, torture, [genocide](#) and [forced sterilisation](#).

This vision must surely recede, however, with the news of Cambridge’s courtship of the UAE. Are there any ethical limits to the university’s passion for co-operation? More than a million Uyghurs in concentration camps may still appear, in some influential parts of Cambridge, a [contested statistic](#); it could be trickier for the university to dismiss [findings from a UK judge](#), the accusations made by Sheikh al-Maktoum’s ex-wife and abducted daughter, the alleged sex assault by a UAE minister, which he denies, on a UK literary festival organiser and the comments made by [Matthew Hedges](#), the British academic imprisoned and mistreated by the UAE, in 2018. The problem, [Hedges says](#) of the proposed deal, is “that the UAE will use Cambridge’s name and association with them for their own gain, namely whitewashing their terrible human rights record”.

Unpopular regimes and plutocrats must be wondering, which laundry? Oxford or Cambridge?

But from the buyer's point of view, too, there must surely be questions. Is £400m a fair price for the Cambridge imprimatur if the same honour is awarded to [China](#) and potentially, since we can clearly forget discrimination on the basis of racist brutality, any paying genocidal leadership? Leave aside the difficulties if students begin to view the university's gifts from living tyrants with the displeasure currently focused on inappropriate historical bequests.

Meanwhile, unpopular regimes and plutocrats must be wondering, which laundry? Oxford or Cambridge? Toope or Richardson? As often with the boat race, it's a close one, but on current form Cambridge still looks, even with uncertain reputational reserves, like the choice for the most stubborn stains.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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Should all contacts of Covid cases go into self-isolation?

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

As we move to ‘living with the virus’, it’s time to consider the balance of benefits and harms of asking people to quarantine



An advertisement for the NHS Covid-19 test-and-trace app. Photograph: Dinendra Haria/LNP/Shutterstock

An advertisement for the NHS Covid-19 test-and-trace app. Photograph: Dinendra Haria/LNP/Shutterstock

Sun 11 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Ministers for the UK government have said the NHS Covid contact tracing app [may need to be less sensitive](#), but is this a good idea when [cases](#) are rising so rapidly? Regardless of what is announced on 19 July, there will be a large wave of new [cases](#), mainly in younger people; the latest ONS infection survey shows 16 to 24-year-olds have the highest infection rates, about 10 times more than in the over-50s. The link from infection to hospitalisations and deaths may have been weakened, but millions of contacts in quarantine implies major economic disruption and challenges to providing healthcare, let alone ruined holidays.

Quarantining contacts only reduces cases if (a) contacts are infected and (b) they isolate before infecting others. Since May 2020, [NHS test and trace](#) has reached more than 7.5 million close contacts and told them to self-isolate for 10 days. The benefit of this enforced inactivity is contestable: under 10% of contacts become lab-confirmed cases, and those who do may already have

passed on the virus, as the median time to reach contacts after the initial case first reported symptoms is around four days.

When it comes to contact tracing using the app, a [study](#) found that in 2020 an average case sent out four pings to contacts. Out of 100 people pinged, only around six became confirmed cases and so were at risk of passing on the virus. Admittedly, this study was conducted before the more-transmissible Delta variant rose to prominence, and in the latest Public Health England technical report, an estimated [11% of household members](#) and 6% of other contacts of Delta cases had confirmed infections.

If contacts have been vaccinated, their chance of being infected with this virus is substantially reduced; although the precise vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic infection with the Delta variant [remains uncertain](#), it is likely to be above 70%. Only a few of 100 vaccinated contacts would be expected to become cases.

As countries move from disaster prevention to “living with the virus”, the cost-effectiveness of policies becomes more pertinent.

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

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[Observer letters](#)[Diana, Princess of Wales](#)

Letters: Diana – the dream and the reality

Perhaps the ordinariness of her statue befits a princess who shone so brightly that she cast a disproportionate shadow



The statue of Diana, Princess of Wales, at the sunken garden of London's Kensington Palace. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

The statue of Diana, Princess of Wales, at the sunken garden of London's Kensington Palace. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 11 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Consensus in the press finds Diana's statue "dull", lacking "vitality" and "frumpy" and it may be true that part of the explanation is that the "energy and purpose have been drained out of the art form" ("[Diana, Wollstonecraft, Wilde... why do we keep getting it so wrong with our statues?](#)", News). There is, however, a more fundamental problem. The idea of Diana, Princess of Wales, was always more significant than the real person. Even in an era of hyper-celebrity, few public figures owed quite so much to projected fantasy as she.

This is not to say that her public works lacked integrity or commitment, but she lived so brightly in the spotlight of both her admirers and detractors that she cast a shadow out of all proportion with her reality. That reality was far more prosaic than many like to admit and, in failing the impossible task of capturing daydreams, perhaps the ordinariness of her statue is inevitable and, arguably, fitting.

Paul McGilchrist

Colchester, Essex

Starmer's Scottish problem

Andrew Rawnsley writes that after the Batley and Spen by-election Keir Starmer is “[drinking in the second chance saloon](#)” (Comment). Here in Scotland, he wouldn’t even be allowed into the building. The reality is that Labour can only deliver Westminster with the election of Scottish MPs, yet with only one MP and a smattering of list MSPs, isn’t it entirely unlikely?

Starmer’s big plan is to acquiesce to Brexit and rerun the 1960s “buy British” campaign. Yet Toby Helm tells us how thousands of small companies are relocating within the single market to counter the damage Brexit has done to their businesses (“[Out! How Brexit sent one UK tennis kit firm to Romania](#)”, News).

Without addressing the division of Brexit, Labour can market itself to the centre ground all it wants. Who’s going to believe it? The real measure of Starmer and Labour’s worth is surely an electorate that prefers the bumbling, lying buffoonery of Boris Johnson and his Tory henchmen to what Labour offers. And that’s precisely why the imperative here in Scotland is for independence.

Jim Taylor

Edinburgh

Heed maternity care evidence

The headline to the article by Sonia Sodha, “[No evidence and little research – it’s no wonder that women and babies continue to die](#)”, could not be further from the truth (Comment). There is extensive high-quality evidence

examining the problems Sodha describes, including on prevention of mother and baby deaths, prevention of harm and psychological trauma, the impact of inequalities and ethnic disparities. Research addresses the need for access to interventions when necessary and avoiding unnecessary interventions, and the provision of high-quality maternity care and continuity of carer. Studies examine women's views and experiences of maternity care. The problem is not lack of evidence but the lack of consistent and adequately resourced implementation of all relevant evidence to ensure safe quality care for all.

It is crucial that we respond effectively and compassionately to the reports of the "terrible care" described not only by Sodha, but also in recent reviews and now in the House of Commons health and social care committee [report](#) on the safety of maternity services in England.

Journalists have a critical role in helping public understanding of why poor care occurs, and how it might be prevented. Knowledge of evidence would help us move beyond polarised debate and support the best possible outcomes and experience for all women, their babies, partners and families.

Professor Lesley Page, visiting professor in [Midwifery](#)

Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery and Palliative care

King's College London

Adjunct professor UTS and Griffith University Queensland

Honorary research fellow Oxford Brookes University

Professor Mary Renfrew

Professor emeritus

University of Dundee

Professor Susan Bewley

Emeritus professor (honorary) in obstetrics and women's health

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Lia Brigante

Consultant midwife public health

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Lead midwife in education and lecturer in healthcare sciences (midwifery)

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Chairperson, Fernandez Foundation, India

Kelda Folliard

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Skylark team and integrated perinatal pathway

Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital

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Veronica Bianco Gutierrez

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National coordinator Association of Radical Midwives

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Griffith University, Queensland

Professor Alexander Heazell

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Holiday? Don't bank on it

“[Burned out? What we need is a new bank holiday](#),” writes Eva Wiseman (Observer Magazine). No, No, No! My daughter is a hospital consultant and a bank holiday for her means more accidents to children, more people in A&E and perhaps fewer staff on duty. Holidays for some but extra work for health workers.

Mary de Vere

Wrenthorpe, Wakefield, West Yorkshire

Levelling up on pensions

John Filby (“Not all over-65s are Tories”, [Letters](#)), echoing [Nick Cohen](#), describes the pensions triple lock as “an embarrassment”. The real embarrassment, nay, scandal is the inadequacy of the basic state pension. At least the triple lock ensures that those who rely solely on it do not see their already poor standard of living further eroded.

If we want to redress intergenerational injustices, a far better target is the perk that those of us receiving generous occupational pensions enjoy, as a result of not paying national insurance contributions. A better-off pensioner with a total income of, say, £30,000 a year from state and occupational pensions pays £2,451 (ie £200 a month) less than their employed counterpart. Removing the triple lock on the state pension would hardly affect such an individual, whereas it would have a significant adverse effect on those scraping by on the measly state pension. If we are serious about removing “embarrassment” and creating a more just tax and pensions regime, why not abolish employees’ NI and raise the basic rate of income

tax accordingly?

Andy Cook

Honley, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire

Failed war on Afghan drugs

Your editorial forecasts a bleak future for the people of Afghanistan (“[The shabby US retreat is a path to civil war and terror](#)”, Comment). Another major failure associated with the western architects of this disastrous military invasion was the war on drugs. Despite spending billions of dollars trying to eradicate the Taliban’s main source of income, 2020 saw a 37% increase in opium poppy cultivation, according to a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [survey](#).

The vacuum left by America and its allies will only energise the drug cartels, corrupt government officials and neighbouring states to profit from this failed state. As our cowardly leaders walk away from a war they started, with the knowledge that they won’t be held accountable, what future do the people of [Afghanistan](#) have? Displaced internally to avoid the fighting, a refugee camp in a foreign country or a migrant boat destined for a western continent that doesn’t want them. It’s important that history records the failure of the war on drugs in [Afghanistan](#) and the reasons why.

Stuart Carruthers

Lewes, East Sussex

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For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 11 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

An opinion piece about space travel said Richard Branson's SpaceShipTwo flight on 11 July "won't even technically go into space, merely quite high in the sky". To clarify, this is based on the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale's definition of space being 100km above the surface of the

Earth, and the spaceship having reached an altitude of 89km in test flights. In the US, where Virgin Galactic is based, the air force and Nasa define space as being 80km above the planet's surface ([This space race has its downside...](#), 4 July, page 37).

An article about Labour's win in the Batley and Spen byelection said: "The mood of British politics would have been very different today if just over 300 votes had gone the other way [to the Conservatives]." That should have said just over 160 votes ([A late surge and an unexpected win: how Kim Leadbeater lifted Labour](#), 4 July, page 6).

Due to an editing error, we referred to the exhibitions group Informa and said that "nearly two-thirds of voting shareholders rejected its latest executive bonus scheme". In fact, the vote related to executive pay in the company's remuneration report ([Big pay deals that fell foul of shareholders](#), 27 June, page 59).

Brrr! A feature about lidos erroneously said the pool at Saltdean in Brighton was unheated ([Different strokes](#), 20 June, Magazine, page 31).

An article said that the 1923 film *Gold Diggers* was "about the Depression"; the reference should have been to a film of 10 years later, *Gold Diggers of 1933* ([Musicals are back... and they're retuned for a new generation](#), 20 June, page 36)

Other recently amended articles include:

[No evidence and little research – it's no wonder that women and babies continue to die](#)

[Desperate graduates rush to study 'panic masters' after job rejections](#)

['We don't need to be cured or fixed': writers speak out on autism](#)

[Write to roam: why armchair travelling is back in fashion](#)

[I love the football team but can't get tribal about England. What's going on?](#)

[Sunderland is coming up shining, despite Brexit and the pandemic](#)

Why science can't resist the allure of Venus: new missions to Earth's nearest planetary neighbour

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
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After Priti Patel has finished, which refugees will carry a torch for Britain?

[Kenan Malik](#)



The malicious borders bill criminalises asylum seekers and anyone who helps them



Gulwali Passarlay carries the Olympic flame between Burnley and Rawtenstall, June 2012. Photograph: Joe Giddens/LOCOG/Press Association Images

Gulwali Passarlay carries the Olympic flame between Burnley and Rawtenstall, June 2012. Photograph: Joe Giddens/LOCOG/Press Association Images

Sun 11 Jul 2021 02.30 EDT

‘Before I died I contemplated how drowning would feel.’ So opens Gulwali Passarlay’s 2015 book [The Lightless Sky](#). Passarlay was, in 2006, a 12-year-old boy in a rural village in Afghanistan, caught in the crossfire between Taliban and American forces. After his father was shot dead by US soldiers, his mother paid a smuggler to take Gulwali and his brother, Hazrat, to safety in Europe. It’s the beginning of a gruelling 12,000-mile trek that takes Passarlay from imprisonment in Iran to being thrown off a moving train in Bulgaria and to seeming death on an overcrowded boat from Turkey to Greece. He survives and makes his way across Europe to the ‘Jungle’ migrant camp in Calais, before smuggling himself into Britain in a refrigerated lorry carrying bananas.

Five years later, after another tortuous and byzantine journey, this time through Britain’s asylum and care systems, Passarlay is eventually granted

the right to stay. Shortly after that comes a real moment of redemption: he is selected to carry the Olympic torch on its journey to the London 2012 Games. “More than anything,” Passarlay writes, “this book is about faith, hope and optimism. A story of kindness, love, humanity and brotherhood.”

I was thinking of Passarlay’s story as I was reading home secretary Priti Patel’s latest immigration proposal. The [nationality and borders bill](#) seeks “to increase the fairness of the system to better protect and support those in need of asylum”. However, here’s the thing. Had this law been in force in 2006, Passarlay would never have been an Olympic torch holder. The moment he set foot in Britain, he would have committed a criminal offence and been locked up and, possibly, sent back to Afghanistan.

The bill proposes “differential treatment of refugees” depending on how they arrived here. Those who came through “regular means” – with papers, or permission to enter the UK – will be eligible to claim asylum. Those who arrived as Passarlay did will not. Any asylum seeker who “knowingly arrives” without “leave to enter” could be jailed for up to four years and then deported.

What else could Passarlay have done? Perhaps, as [Sabir Zazai](#), another refugee, who also arrived here “illegally” and is now the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council, acidly observed, he could “have gone to the Taliban and said to them that I am fleeing your regime, will you please issue me a passport and then comfortably walked to the British embassy to complete a simple form to seek asylum in the UK”.

The new law removes the words “for gain”, meaning that someone can be jailed even for providing humanitarian assistance

The very fact of a regime being oppressive is what makes it impossible to follow legal procedures. In any case, Britain has closed down virtually all [“safe and legal” routes for asylum seekers](#). The new bill does not criminalise “illegal” entry, it criminalises the very act of seeking asylum. “It will make sure,” as Passarlay said to me, “that people like me will never get the opportunity for safety and sanctuary.” It is cruelty dressed up as law.

Not just asylum seekers, but anyone helping them will also be criminalised – and could face life imprisonment. Currently, it's an offence to aid undocumented migrants “for gain”. The new law removes the words “for gain”, meaning that someone can be jailed even for providing humanitarian assistance.

This demolishes the government's claim that the bill is about “breaking the business model of people-smuggling networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger”. In reality, it's the bill that will endanger lives. As the Commons foreign affairs select committee warned in 2019, “a policy that focuses exclusively on closing borders will drive migrants to take more dangerous routes, and push them into the hands of criminal groups”. The government seems happy to provide more work for the smugglers so long as it can gain political capital at the same time.

Ministers claim the new law is necessary because an upsurge of asylum seekers is putting stress on the system. Images of migrants crossing the channel in flimsy boats have reinforced that claim. In fact, in historical terms, numbers are low. In 2019 (the last full year before the pandemic), there were fewer asylum applicants than there will be spectators at Wembley today for the England v Italy final, and less than half the figure of 20 years ago. [Last year, the numbers were lower still](#).

In international terms, too, British figures are tiny. Around 45,000 people claimed asylum in Britain in 2019. The comparative figure for Germany was 165,000, for France 129,000 and for Spain 118,000.

The comparison with non-European countries is starker still. There is a widespread perception that Europe bears the greatest burden in welcoming asylum seekers and refugees. In fact, 86% of refugees are hosted in developing countries and [73% in neighbouring countries](#). According to the World Bank, of the [top 10 countries hosting refugees](#), just one is in the west – Germany.

Migrants often face the charge of being 'scroungers'... many on the right are happy to push such claims

Ministers talk incessantly about the need for a “fair” migration and asylum system. From a global perspective, there is little fairness in western asylum policies. The world’s richest nations push the poorest to bear an even more disproportionate refugee burden than they already do.

What about fairness to Britons? I doubt if the average voter would think it in any sense “fair” to treat someone such as Passarlay as a criminal for leaving his homeland in the only way he could. The problem, though, is the way the immigration debate is framed. Migrants, especially poor ones, whether asylum seekers or economic migrants, often face the charge of being “scroungers” or “queue jumpers”. Many on the right have been only too happy to push such claims. Many on the left, and especially the Labour party, are too frightened of challenging them, fearful of losing electoral support. There is, though, no iron law that the public must always be apprehensive about immigration. It is, in part, the timidity in questioning immigration myths that helps sustain them.

At the same time, too many on the left view those expressing anxieties about immigration as bigoted or racist. As a result, those who worry about immigration become even less willing to listen to the counter arguments.

The immigration debate is polarised between those who accept the myths and those who dismiss the anxieties. What we need is to both engage with the anxieties and to challenge the myths. Given the sheer cynicism and cruelty of the new immigration bill, there is no more urgent time to do that.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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

Fake voters exist only in Boris Johnson's fevered imagination

[Nick Cohen](#)



The prime minister's push against voting rights has no place in mainstream politics



Protesters with placards against government sleaze and voter IDs demonstrate in Whitehall ahead of the state opening of parliament on 11 May. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

Protesters with placards against government sleaze and voter IDs demonstrate in Whitehall ahead of the state opening of parliament on 11 May. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 10 Jul 2021 14.00 EDT

A government that can terrify a population can usually do what it wants with it. If nothing else survives of his journalism, HL Mencken's warning from 1918 will never perish: "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, most of them imaginary."

British [Conservatives](#) and the US Republicans have added a modern game to the demagogic playbook. They are creating an imaginary fear that elections are being rigged in order to rig elections. They will protect democracy by removing the right to vote.

Boris Johnson's hobgoblin is a fake voter, almost certainly from an ethnic minority. These masters of disguise steal honest citizens' ballots by

pretending to be them at polling stations. When the honest citizens arrive, election officials tell them that they have already voted and call the police.

Fake voters are a fake. If they weren't, you would have read hundreds of articles about people whose identities had been stolen. The government's own [research](#) found that personation fraud at the polling station accounted for just eight of the allegations of electoral fraud made in 2018. When Lutfur Rahman, the corrupt mayor of Tower Hamlets, was found guilty in the [biggest electoral fraud](#) trial of recent times, the fraud consisted of funnelling bribes to Bengali organisations that were "totally ineligible" for public money, not for arranging for body doubles to flood polling stations.

Voter suppression, the deliberate attempt to influence the outcome of an election by stopping poor and black voters opposing the conservative elite, is normally accompanied by lies about stolen elections. Donald Trump and the US Republicans had a [strategy](#) to brainwash their supporters after their defeat in the 2020 US presidential election. They fed them allegations of double voting, the dead voting, and out-of-state voters moving into states with tight contests. Not one allegation stood up in court, but at least Trump made the effort to provide a cover story.

British democracy is so decayed Johnson does not feel the need to lie. He happily admits the hobgoblin is a fantasy from his calculating mind. Asked by Ian Blackford of the Scottish National party last week [how he could justify his "Trumpian" tactics](#), Johnson said he wanted to protect elections from "the idea of voter fraud". Not the reality of a crime that barely exists – for you would need thousands of impersonators to swing an election – but from the idea, the notion, the paranoid fear that it might exist, even though it doesn't.

He is attempting to disfranchise poor voters by demanding that everyone produces photo ID before they vote. Ministers [dismiss concerns](#) about [the 2.1 million people without ID](#) by saying that councils can issue the requisite passes, while knowing full well that most voters won't know how to apply for them. Meanwhile, in trials of voter ID in local elections, 750 of the 2,000 people polling stations [turned away for having no ID never came back](#). Maybe they could not be bothered to go home and search through their documents, or had to go to work. No one checked, but the point remains that

Johnson's laws against a phantom menace will stop not only people without a driving licence or passport voting, but others who do not have the time or inclination to negotiate his new bureaucracy.

His willingness to attack fundamentals of democracy marks Johnson out as an extreme rather than a mainstream right-winger. The division between the two is nowhere as clear-cut as it appears. Professor Tim Bale, a historian of British conservatism, [invites readers to consider](#) who delivered a speech saying that a liberal elite was turning the British into foreigners in their own land. "Talk about tax and they call you greedy. Talk about crime and they call you reactionary. Talk about asylum and they call you racist." It wasn't Nigel Farage during the Brexit referendum in 2016, but William Hague, the leader of the Conservative party, in 2001.

Farage had his opportunity when David Cameron briefly moved the Conservative party away from Euro-extremism and a hard line on immigration in the early 00s. And all he did was mouth the slogans of previous Tory leaders. The fringe does not always take over the mainstream and pull it to the right or left. Often, it is impossible to disentangle the two and decide who is the monkey and who is the organ grinder.

In [Riding the Populist Wave](#), published next month, political scientists from across Europe emphasise that the difference between the radical and mainstream right is as much about means as ends. Almost by definition, populists are disloyal actors who do not accept the rules of the democratic system that mainstream politicians abide by.

His policies are designed to ensure that a party such as Ukip never outflanks them on the right again

Johnson's attempt to deny the vote to secure an electoral advantage, along with his attacks on parliament and the independence of the judiciary, BBC and civil service, marks him a member of the Trump club of rightwing extremists. Meanwhile, his policies are designed to ensure that a party such as Ukip never outflanks the Conservatives on the right again, and Westminster is filled with bellows to punish asylum seekers, cut international aid and damn England footballers who protest against racism.

I am not sure the Conservatives will listen to my advice, but I am going to give it anyway. They need to watch their backs. The mainstream Republicans in France moved so far to the right to see off [Marine Le Pen](#) that Emmanuel Macron and his centrists were able to destroy them.

David Davis, who is hardly a woke liberal, told me the prime minister acts like a caricature metropolitan elitist who thinks Leave voters are thick, ugly and racist – rather than men and women concerned about tax bills and public services. His stunts reveal a populist who doesn't understand his people, and thinks they will be satisfied with stupid arguments and mindless cruelty.

As if to prove the point, [research](#) by the Electoral Commission found that 90% of the public thought voting at polling stations was safe. Boris Johnson's hobgoblin does not even haunt the nightmares of most of his core supporters. Perhaps one day a few of them will tire of a prime minister who treats them as if they were terrified toddlers and put a cross against another politician's name.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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NHS staff abused by people seeking second Covid jab early for holiday

Doctors say some vaccination centres have had to call police or hire security guards over safety fears

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Many ‘angry and frustrated’ people are seeking a second jab sooner than the official eight weeks, GPs said. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Many ‘angry and frustrated’ people are seeking a second jab sooner than the official eight weeks, GPs said. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Denis Campbell](#)

Sat 10 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Covid vaccinators are facing abuse, threats and aggression from people demanding their second jab early so they can go on holiday this summer, doctors have said.

In one incident, vaccination site staff were so concerned for their safety that they called the police, while some GP-led vaccination centres have had to hire security guards to protect them, the Guardian has learned.

Those involved appear to be “angry and frustrated” people who want to have their second Covid jab sooner than eight weeks after the first one – the official minimum gap – so they can go abroad.

One vaccination lead in the south-east of England said: “We’ve had a number of violent and aggressive incidents at sites, and even had to call the police, with people demanding their vaccine earlier than eight weeks.

“These incidents involved verbal abuse and aggressive and threatening behaviour. We have had to bring in security for our walk-in and ‘grab-a-jab’ sessions.”

A GP in London said: “Just the other day one of our volunteers was spat at, which was awful. We’ve had to hire security to deal with the abuse we’re getting.”

Another family doctor, in the north-east of England, said the vaccination site they helped to run had had to assign a nurse to work full-time talking to people who were seeking second jabs before the eight-week gap set down by the government’s advisory Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

“That’s one less clinician actually vaccinating people. Some people come back in day after day to every session waiting to see if there might be some leftover vaccines and asking again and again if we will give it earlier,” the GP said.

It is unclear how common such incidents are. But Ruth Rankine, the director of primary care at the [NHS](#) Confederation, said: “We are hearing from our members that around the country people are coming to vaccination sites, often angry and frustrated, that they are unable to have their second dose of the Covid vaccines earlier than the recommended eight weeks.

“This is despite the JCVI guidance which says that second dose vaccinations should not be given any earlier than this. Our members are frequently spending a lot of time explaining this to the public, as well as telling them that a longer gap between doses has been shown to increase immunity,” she added.

GP leaders fear that such unsavoury behaviour, especially by younger adults, could intensify following the government’s decision on Thursday to [allow double-jabbed Britons](#) to return from amber-list countries this summer without having to quarantine.

“Now that the government has announced that fully vaccinated holidaymakers will not have to quarantine when they come back to the UK from either amber or green list countries, and with many other countries only allowing people who have had two jabs to enter without having to quarantine, I think this will become an even bigger issue in the coming weeks,” said Rankine.

“This is especially going to be the case for younger people, many of whom will not be eligible for their second dose before September.”

She called on ministers to send “a much clearer message explaining to the public why they cannot receive the second vaccine dose before eight weeks, and that in waiting they are also helping to boost their immunity against Covid”.

The new approach on foreign travel will come into force from Monday 19 July, which Boris Johnson has called “freedom day”. That is the day on which most remaining restrictions on social mixing in England will be lifted, despite concern among many scientists that the move is dangerous and will lead to more infections, hospitalisations and deaths.

A vaccination lead in London said: “There’s significant pressure from the public to give second doses early. We’ve even received a formal complaint from someone who wanted to go on holiday.”

A Yorkshire GP said: “We’ve had quite a few foreign students wanting their second dose early as they are desperate to return home for the summer and see family.”

The Royal College of GPs and NHS England said the behaviour towards vaccinators was unacceptable and unfair, especially given their key role in protecting the public.

Prof Martin Marshall, the chair of the Royal College of GPs, said: “It is understandable that people want to be fully vaccinated as soon as possible. But it is entirely unacceptable for anybody working on the Covid vaccination programme, be it in GP-led sites, mass vaccination centres or hospital centres, to be at the receiving end of verbal abuse and intimidation.

“This will likely have a serious and unfair impact on staff wellbeing and morale, when they are working hard to protect people from Covid-19 and help life get back to normal.”

NHS England’s “grab-a-jab” campaign, which began last month, aims to encourage eligible people to ensure they have their first or second jab as soon as possible, sometimes at sports stadiums or other venues. The Guardian disclosed last week that some vaccination sites had been administering second doses as little as three weeks after the first, especially of the Pfizer jab, often to young adults who want to protect themselves against the Delta variant, but also to would-be holidaymakers.

One scientist warned on Thursday that those receiving their second jab sooner than eight weeks may be less protected against Covid.

“There is what you might call a sort of sour point, where if you administer the second dose at about between six and seven weeks, you may actually have a much less effective boost than if you wait for eight weeks or more,” Prof Peter Openshaw, a member of the government’s New and Emerging

Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag), told the Today programme on BBC Radio 4.

Dr Nikki Kanani, NHS England's medical director of primary care and a GP, said: "Abuse of NHS staff – who have spent days, evenings and weekends protecting their patients and communities by delivering three-quarters of all life-saving Covid-19 jabs – is completely unacceptable. The NHS is vaccinating in line with JCVI guidance and has zero tolerance for bad behaviour towards any staff member."

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'Dread and anxiety' among NHS staff as Covid cases surge again

Mixture of resignation and anger on frontline, but bosses expect 'slow burn' rather than crippling pressure



A patient receives applause from staff at the Royal Papworth hospital in Cambridge as he is discharged after 151 days being treated for Covid.
Photograph: Keith Heppell/PA

A patient receives applause from staff at the Royal Papworth hospital in Cambridge as he is discharged after 151 days being treated for Covid.
Photograph: Keith Heppell/PA



Denis Campbell *Health policy editor*

Fri 9 Jul 2021 12.07 EDT

“NHS staff have a sense of dread about what’s around the corner. While we understand things need to open up some time, the timing feels like utter madness while we are so close to successfully vaccinating the population, and with a more contagious variant circulating.”

That view, expressed by a frontline respiratory consultant, is widely shared across the NHS. The doctor concerned has already grappled with the first two waves of Covid. She is now steeling herself for the next one which, despite being in its early stages, has already led one major hospital trust, in Leeds, to cancel scheduled surgery, including several cancer operations.

Among an NHS workforce weary after 16 months dealing with the pandemic there is a mixture of apprehension, nervousness, fear, a here-we-go-again resignation at the return of a familiar foe, stoical readiness to do their best again, and also anger that they will have to.

The same doctor adds: “We’ve seen a steady increase in [Covid] numbers over the past few weeks and are back to having a full Covid ward and patients on intensive care. While they are overall a lot younger, sadly deaths are slowly creeping up despite this.

“Healthcare professionals are deeply anxious about the impact of relaxing restrictions further given the current surge in Covid cases. To do away with risk-mitigating measures like social distancing and wearing of masks is incomprehensible to many of us. I feel anxious and frustrated.

“The dread and anxiety are because we’ve been here before, we’ve lived through the first two – or three depending on where you are – waves. We don’t want to be back in that place where we are on ‘escalation’ rotas, routine work is cancelled and we are dealing with deaths that we believe could have been preventable with a better public health strategy.”

Dr Nick Scriven, the immediate past president of the Society for Acute Medicine, who works in a hospital in Yorkshire, says: “Us up north are experiencing a fourth wave in community cases, with an uptick in hospital cases. Although numbers are not massive it’s both frightening and upsetting for staff as ICU cases are rising with unvaccinated people, either as they are young or by choice or both. There is to me a growing feeling that vaccination makes this almost preventable.”

However, doctors and hospital bosses are a bit more relaxed about the coming next surge in cases because they expect it to be different to the intensely demanding first two: smaller, less dramatic and less likely to cripple the NHS. Dr Rupert Pearse, an intensive care consultant in London, tweeted sardonically last weekend [to say](#): “As we did in November 2020 we are projecting a ‘slow burn’ of hospital admissions rather than a third wave. Let’s hope our forecast is more accurate this time.”

Covid admissions to hospitals generally and intensive care units specifically are going up again, reflecting the sharp recent growth in infections. But the numbers involved remain low compared with spring last year and last winter, and the trajectory, while unmistakably upward, is nothing like as vertical as it was then.

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of hospital group NHS Providers, says: “For this set of variants, vaccines have broken the link between infections and previously high hospitalisations/mortality rates. So there’s high confidence among trust leaders that increasing community infection rates, even to the levels we saw in January, will not translate into the levels of

hospitalisation and mortality we saw in that peak; a peak that brought extreme pressure to the NHS.”

But Hopson said in a [thread of tweets](#) this week on the NHS’s readiness to withstand the next wave that even a smaller surge in Covid cases posed a threat to a health service that is already – and official figures bear this out – the busiest it has ever been.



Ambulances with patients arriving at the Whitechapel hospital in east London. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

He pointed to the NHS’s efforts to tackle the huge backlog of people needing hospital treatment and deal with the record number of people turning up at A&E, while trying to give tired, stressed staff some much-needed time off and function with fewer beds than pre-pandemic because social distancing in hospitals means an eight-bed ward now contains just six. He is also increasingly concerned about the burden that the rising number of cases of “long Covid” is now placing on hospitals – a much less prevalent problem during the first and second waves.

Scriven says: “It’s overwhelming busy even without another Covid wave. Moving forwards, the government-projected rise [in infections to 100,000 a day] due to unlocking is a concern. Even if the hospital numbers don’t reach

the same levels, the NHS is in a really difficult place. Any rise in Covid will seriously challenge elective [surgery] recovery and urgent and emergency care that is already struggling under the demand.”

Hopson and his counterpart at the NHS Confederation, Matthew Taylor, have warned in recent days that a new influx Covid-positive patients arriving when an overloaded, under-staffed service is facing winter-like demand for care in July would inevitably force hospitals to limit the amount of surgery they can perform. “Any significant Covid surge this summer will place even more strain on a system struggling to cope,” said Taylor.

With ministers putting pressure on the NHS to give the 5.3 million people on the waiting list in England the treatment they need as soon as possible, the service’s inability to do so – and the prospect of a fresh suspension of normal care – could become a key political issue.

Hopson points out that this time around the risk for the NHS is not “the likely absolute level of Covid-19 hospital admissions”, which thanks to the vaccination programme should be much lower than before. It is more about the next wave’s timing and the service’s underlying fragility after a decade of austerity funding and chronic staff shortages.

Delays to surgery can have consequences, he says ominously, suggesting they may prove unavoidable, depending on events outwith the health service’s control, especially what happens in England after “freedom day” on 19 July. “Trust leaders obviously have a mission to avoid any unnecessary harm. So they are instinctively uneasy about potential harm to any patient. But they also recognise wider issues at stake here.”

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[Business](#)

Employers to be free to abandon face masks and social distancing in England

Message to work from home where possible to be dropped on 19 July along with other Covid restrictions

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Many decisions concerning face coverings and distancing will be left up to employers as Covid restrictions ease. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

Many decisions concerning face coverings and distancing will be left up to employers as Covid restrictions ease. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

[*Joanna Partridge*](#)

Fri 9 Jul 2021 12.07 EDT

Face masks and social distancing will be dropped in most workplaces in England, under new guidance for employers being planned by the government.

The message to employees to [work from home](#) where possible is set to be [abandoned by Boris Johnson on 19 July](#), alongside the lifting of almost all other coronavirus restrictions.

A raft of measures designed to hinder the spread of coronavirus among colleagues were [introduced by ministers last spring](#), including physical distancing, one-way systems and the provision of handwashing facilities.

[UK flights and credit card purchases rise as Covid rules ease](#)

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During the pandemic, the government has [produced 14 documents](#), advising employers on how to ensure safe working in all kinds of workplaces, from factories and close contact settings such as hairdressers, to hospitality venues and laboratories.

It is understood the existing guides will be reduced and incorporated into a small number of documents in the coming days, which will provide new advice for employers across all sectors of the economy.

As a result, businesses and organisations will be given more discretion over how to handle safe working arrangements for their staff while inside their premises, and will be advised to continue running their own risk assessments.

Many decisions concerning face coverings and distancing will be left up to employers, while some of the most specific guidance banning the sharing of pens, and on how many people should travel inside a lift, is expected to be scrapped.

Even though the government opted not to make mask-wearing mandatory inside offices in its earlier guidance, there are fears among companies and organisations that they will have to make some difficult decisions over how to keep their workers safe.

Business groups and trade unions are calling for the new government document to provide clear advice.

Companies should be allowed to take decisions based on their own circumstances, and should work with staff to find the best solutions, said Roger Barker, the director of policy at the business group the Institute of Directors.

“It is vital that the government’s new guidance provides business leaders with the information necessary to weigh up the pros and cons of specific Covid security policies, such as those relating to face masks, social distancing and ventilation,” Barker said.

He added that businesses remain concerned about how their employees arrive at their workplace, which is outside organisations’ control.

“The government needs to play a role in rebuilding trust in public transport and at least recommending that rail companies, for example, continue to require the use of masks,” he said.

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Frances O’Grady, the general secretary of the trade union body the [TUC](#), has [criticised government for not consulting unions](#) on its new workplace guidance. She urged ministers to rethink their plans.

“There is no one-size-fits-all solution to safety at work as restrictions go,” O’Grady said.

“Replacing proper guidance with vague exhortations to employers to do the right thing will result in confusion – and rising infections. This amounts to the government washing its hands of its responsibility to ensure workplace safety.”

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Travel

Amber list travel: places to visit this summer quarantine-free

England is easing travel restrictions to more destinations from 19 July, here are some gems off the beaten track

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Tranquil getaway on the beach in Porec, Croatia. Photograph: Antonio Bronić/Reuters

Tranquil getaway on the beach in Porec, Croatia. Photograph: Antonio Bronić/Reuters

[Kevin Rushby](#)

Fri 9 Jul 2021 13.28 EDT

With changes to the [UK travel rules](#), an overseas summer holiday is now a realistic prospect for Britons who have been fully vaccinated at least 14 days before departure.

British requirements will still mean, at a minimum, an antigen test before returning and a PCR test within two days of arrival back in the UK.

Some countries still require a test before leaving, or a passenger locator form (in addition to the UK's own). In a normal year, choosing a destination might take months to mull over, with heated family debates through the winter, but not this time. Snap decisions are needed. Where to go? Here is a list of possible countries.

Croatia

Entry requirements: no isolation for double-jabbed people on arrival, but you need to fill in an online form ([at entercroatia.mup.hr/](#)) before travelling and show proof of accommodation booking. Masks must be worn indoors and when social distancing cannot be maintained. Restaurants are open for indoor and outdoor dining. Cafes and bars open only outdoors.

Croatia has a stunning coastline and islands, but some spots can get crowded: Dubrovnik and Split are normally heaving in summer; popular islands like Rab and Hvar can also get busy. Instead head for the less well-known islands, places like Dubi Otok, Brijuni and Lastovo. Any island that requires a double ferry journey is likely to be a good choice. To really get away, try an activity holiday like kayaking or sailing.



Old town Lastovo on the Adriatic coast, Croatia. Photograph: DavorLovincic/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Malik Adventures go out to the Kornati islands where you will be lucky to see another tourist. Alternatively head up into the mountains like Velebit where there is great hiking and wonderful villages and mountain huts. Croatian food and drink are superb and it's often up in the mountains where you will find the real gems, like Drniš, home to the best dry-cured ham, pršut.

Cyprus

Entry requirements: Those who have had two vaccinations more than 14 days before travel still need to complete a Cyprus Flight Pass no more than 48 hours before departure (cyprusflightpass.gov.cy/en/vaccinated-fly-request.) Cafes, bars and restaurants are open at reduced indoor capacity. Nightclubs are open but dancefloors remain closed.



Caledonia waterfall trail in Troodos mountains in Cyprus.

Photograph: Dynamoland/Alamy

Crowds are normally easy to find in Cypriot cities such as Paphos and Ayia Napa. To get off the beaten trail, head for the Troodos Mountains in the south-west and bike around its villages or hike up to the Caledonia Falls. Finish with some grilled trout and a glass of the local dessert wine, commandaria, the world's oldest named wine, still in production after 800 years.

France

Entry requirements: Fully vaccinated people do not need to quarantine but will need a negative PCR test performed within 72 hours before arrival, or an antigen test within 48 hours. Masks are obligatory indoors and on public transport.



Flowering of the daffodils on the plateau of Biou in spring at Ossau Valley, Pyrenees National Park, France.

Photograph: Biosphoto/Alamy

There is no doubt that the mountains will be calling loudly this summer with fresh air and plenty of space. Fortunately France has many upland regions to offer: the Jura, Massif Central and **Pyrenees** all look like good bets. Where the traditional seaside hotels may lose out, the winner will be the traditional gites (gites-de-france.com/en) which give you self-catering and remote rural locations.

Germany

Entry requirements: Double-jabbed people are exempt from quarantine regulations but as the UK is currently classed high incidence area, you must complete a pre-departure form at einreiseanmeldung.de/#/. Entry by land involves different regulations which you should check. Music venues and nightclubs are closed, but the situation varies around the country according to federal regulations. Beer gardens and outdoor dining are generally open.



Sunset on the lake at Mecklenburg, western Pomerania, Ruegen, Sellin.
Photograph: Westend61 GmbH/Alamy

Germany is a country that British visitors had begun to visit in increasing numbers before the pandemic. With great mountain scenery, beautiful lakes and forests, plus a fine coastline, it has a lot to offer. Try the waterways and lakes in Meklenburg, a summer favourite for Berliners, or head down into Saxony for superb villages and scenery close to the Czech border. In the Baltic, islands such as Rugen offer a gentle relaxed pace of life perfect for a walking or cycling holiday.

Greece

Entry requirements: No isolation for those who have a vaccination certificate proving full vaccination at least 14 days before departure. You must fill out a passenger locator form (<https://travel.gov.gr/#/>) before arrival. Masks are obligatory indoors. Random tests are being performed at airports.



Swimmers and sunbathers at ‘Seychelles’ in the island of Ikaria, Greece.
Photograph: Dimitris Tosidis/EPA

While some Greek islands attract crowds, others are tranquil havens even in high season. From Piraeus take a ferry out to spectacular mountainous places like Amorgo, Ikaria and Sifnos where long walks along mountain trails lead to stunning beaches and villages. On the mainland head for the gorges near the Albanian border from bases like Ioannina and Kastoria, or the wonderful green peninsula of Pelion. In August when the days can be hot, get up early and you will have the place to yourself.

Morocco

Entry requirements: Proof of double vaccination more than 14 days before departure. You also need to present a completed Public Health Passenger form on arrival (onda.ma/form.php). Bars and restaurants are open but close at 11pm.



A Berber village in the Toubkal national park, Morocco.

Photograph: Dorin Marius Balate/Alamy Stock Photo

At 4,167m Mount Toubkal is the highest peak in north Africa and a worthy challenge for a first overseas trip in a long while. It's usually climbed from Imlil, a small mountain village which is a taxi ride from Marrakech (the 67km is often cycled too). These Atlas mountain villages are wonderful to explore, but you might want to wait until September when the weather is cooler. From Imlil you could head for Ijoukak. Many UK tour operators do hiking trips out here. Another great peak is Mount Mgoun, 4,071m, a less visited peak that stands above the Ait Bougmez valley where terraced fields rise up the mountain sides.

Portugal

Entry requirements: No isolation for fully vaccinated over-18s. Face masks are worn indoors and outdoors when social distancing cannot be guaranteed. Restrictions tend to be tighter than in UK. Bars, cafes and restaurants are open normally.



The imposing Pena Palace in Sintra, Portugal. Photograph: Patrícia de Melo Moreira/AFP/Getty Images

A hugely popular destination for the British, but Portugal still has many less-explored areas outside the hotspots of Lisbon, Porto and the Algarve. New walking and cycling routes in the mountains offer a great chance to get away from crowds. Saddle Skedaddle, for example, do a great mountain bike trip, Atlantic Trails, to the mountains near Sintra while walking specialists, Inntravel, offer a lovely trip through the country's only national park, Peneda-Gerês, on the northern border with Spain where there are wild horses and a small population of ibex.

Spain

Entry requirements: No isolation needed for people who have been fully vaccinated, but must have negative PCR test within 72 hours of departure. Face masks not mandatory in public spaces. Bars open as normal.



Sunrise at the peak of Les Agudes, in the natural park of Montseny, Catalonia, Spain.

Photograph: Cristian Zaharia/Alamy

Not so long ago tourist hotspots like Barcelona were calling for a curb on numbers lest their neighbourhoods be overrun. The situation now is very different, but it's a chance to look at regions of the country that have never registered much on the visitor radar. Inland from places like Valencia and Benidorm are mountainous areas that have become depopulated in recent decades and yet boast magnificent traditional villages and ancient trails. Farther north in Catalonia, Wild Frontiers do a walking tour of the Montseny national park that also offers chance to discover Priorat – one of Spain's best, but less well-known wines.

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Vaccines working as expected in preventing Covid deaths, say experts

Total of 118 people have died after two doses in England, as PHE says vaccine drive has prevented about 30,000 deaths

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A health worker preparing a dose of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine at a vaccination clinic set up in Derby, Derbyshire, in March. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

A health worker preparing a dose of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine at a vaccination clinic set up in Derby, Derbyshire, in March. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

[Natalie Grover](#) Science correspondent

[@NatalieGrover](#)

Fri 9 Jul 2021 12.00 EDT

Two people under 50 and more than 100 over-50s have died of Covid after being fully vaccinated, official figures for [England](#) show, as experts said the jabs were working as expected amid surging infection rates attributed to the Delta variant.

Public Health England (PHE) [figures](#) show that between 1 February and 21 June this year, there were 118 deaths in people who had had both vaccine doses, 116 of them over 50.

Among over-50s who died due to the Delta variant in that period, nearly half had been fully vaccinated while just 21 unvaccinated people under the age of 50 died. This is expected to be due to the “very strong risk-gradient with age”, said Sir David Spiegelhalter, chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at the University of Cambridge.

An unvaccinated 30-year-old had a lower risk from coronavirus than a 60-year-old who had been jabbed, he said.

The Delta variant of coronavirus – which is believed to be more transmissible and brings a greater risk of hospital admission and death – has become dominant in the UK.

[PHE estimates](#) that two-dose vaccine effectiveness against hospital admission with Delta is about 94% and scientists think there is likely a similar reduction against death, which means the lethal risk is reduced to less than a [20th of its usual value](#).

So far 65% of the adult population has been fully vaccinated and many restrictions have already been lifted.

“Infections in the current wave will be mainly in younger people at low risk, but the vaccine is not perfect and unfortunately there will be more deaths among fully vaccinated people,” said Spiegelhalter.

Prof Christina Pagel, the director of UCL's Clinical Operational Research Unit, said: "I don't think that the deaths [in the latest PHE report] are a sign that something is happening that we're not expecting. But I think we definitely know that infections are bad because they will inevitably lead to more hospitalisations and deaths, not at the same scale that we had before, but a significant number."

She predicted the UK would end up "with well over 1,000 hospitalisations a day this summer".

PHE said about 30,300 deaths, 46,300 hospital admissions and 8,151,000 infections had been prevented by the UK's vaccination programme.

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‘An accumulation of weakness’: the flaws fuelling Indonesia’s Covid surge

Critics accuse government of incompetence, denial and dragging its feet in response to pandemic

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Healthcare workers assist Covid-19 patients in a temporary tent outside the A&E department of a hospital on the outskirts of Jakarta. Photograph: Willy Kurniawan/Reuters

Healthcare workers assist Covid-19 patients in a temporary tent outside the A&E department of a hospital on the outskirts of Jakarta. Photograph: Willy Kurniawan/Reuters

[Gemma Holliani Cahya](#) in Jakarta and [Rebecca Ratcliffe](#)

Fri 9 Jul 2021 10.37 EDT

From her home in Pamekasan, East Java, Dr Ratna Hermawati can hear the names of the dead echoing out across her neighbourhood. A new Covid-19 fatality is announced from a speaker at the nearby mosque at least five times a day. Ratna would normally be at work, managing the hospital's overstretched isolation rooms, but, after testing positive for Covid, she has been required to stay home.

"I know my fellow medical workers are trying our best to use whatever we have to serve our patients," she said. Nine other doctors in the hospital are also infected, just as the wards are busier than ever.

Her hospital is one of many buckling under [the pressure of Indonesia's escalating Covid-19 outbreak](#). The country announced another record daily increase in cases on Thursday, with 38,391 infections and 852 fatalities.

[Covid surge pushes Indonesia's health system to the brink](#)

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Epidemiologists say the official numbers are likely to be a significant underestimate and point to the country's severe lack of testing. "We know we have already achieved more than 100,000 a day," said Dr Dicky Budiman at Australia's Griffith University. His estimates are based on fatality data recorded at a local level.

Images taken at hospitals in Java's main cities show the severity of the outbreak. Emergency tents have been set up in car parks, where patients lie in rows awaiting a space on a ward. Elsewhere, long queues stretch outside shops selling oxygen, as families unable to find a hospital bed for their relatives try to treat them at home.

Workers at Rorotan public cemetery in Jakarta stay until after dark, expanding the grid of graves dug for Covid fatalities. The number of burials in the capital had increased 10-fold since May, according to officials.



People queue to refill their oxygen cylinders in Jakarta. Photograph: Dita Alangkara/AP

“This is an accumulation of our weakness in the system,” said Pandu Riono, an epidemiologist at the University of [Indonesia](#), of the latest outbreak. “You cannot only blame the virus, actually this is the problem of human behaviour.”

Indonesia’s pandemic response has been fraught from the start. It was not until 2 March last year that the country confirmed it had detected two Covid cases, despite indications the virus had been present in the country as early as January. The health minister at the time, Terawan Agus Putranto, [attacked a report](#) by Harvard University that Indonesia may have unreported infections. He said that praying had kept the virus away.

Indonesia has since faced one of the worst outbreaks in south-east Asia, though demographics and geography have offered some cover over the past year, said Dicky. “Indonesia has experienced a ‘silent outbreak’ so far ... We have this young population and we have many islands,” he said, adding that this had helped to slow or mask the extent of the virus’s spread.

Such factors, however, have been vastly overwhelmed by the arrival of the more infectious Delta variant. The new strain, combined with travel related

to Eid al-Fitr, has laid bare the longstanding failures in the country's pandemic measures.

Epidemiologists had warned of a surge in cases and urged the government to restrict travel and gatherings during the festive period. By the time a short travel ban was imposed, many had already packed into airports and train stations to travel to their home towns.

Indonesia cases

“The government acted too late to reduce the transmission rate. [It has been] incompetent in reading the data and ignored the warnings of experts,” said Yurdhina Meilissa, the chief strategist at the Center for Indonesia’s Strategic Development Initiatives.

The country’s president, Joko Widodo, has been reluctant to impose strong lockdown measures throughout the pandemic for fear of economic disruption. Rules that have been in place have not always been strictly enforced.

Until recently, officials were encouraging domestic travel, unveiling a “work from Bali” scheme to boost the hotel and tourism sector there. The programme was suspended last week, when tougher measures were imposed in Java and Bali in response to spiralling case numbers.

Health experts accuse the government of sending mixed messages to the public, and of failing to boost health systems and surveillance when infections were more manageable.



New graves dug for Covid victims at the Rorotan cemetery in Jakarta.
Photograph: Mast Irham/EPA

Indonesia's testing rate remains one of the lowest in the world. The number carried out has increased over the past week, but it is still far below government targets and is not keeping pace with the outbreak. The number of people found to have the virus has also risen, with more than a quarter of tests coming back positive nationally. The rate in Jakarta is 50%.

There is little active case tracing, said Dicky, who added that health teams in the worst-affected areas were operating in the dark. "Many districts in Java, and out of Java also, don't know about the problem because they don't have enough data," he said.

Hospitals are barely able to cope with the current surge. "What is happening right now in the hospitals is a functional collapse," said Adib Khumaidi, the risk mitigation team leader at the Indonesian Medical Association (IMA).

['Dire need': Australia urged to offer more aid to Indonesia as Covid crushes health system](#)

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In Ratna's hospital more than half of patients are being treated for Covid, compared with roughly a third last year. Most are in critical condition when they arrive, she said, which was not the case previously. Some patients refuse to accept that they have tested positive, and instead lash out at hospital staff.

Infections among health workers, who have mostly been given the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine, have added to the pressure facing medics. Twenty-two nurses and 35 doctors have died after catching Covid in the past nine days, according to the IMA and the Indonesian Nurses Association.

The government has imposed restrictions across Java and Bali to try to curb the number of cases, but health experts point out that domestic travel is still allowed and that there are many exceptions for essential workers.

Whether the restrictions are effective will depend on how strictly they are enforced, said Pandu Riono, an epidemiologist at the University of Indonesia. “Do you want the worst scenario, the very extreme, or the best scenario [where] you should do everything that you can to reduce the transmission, and then you will reach the peak in the next month?”

Ratna will return to work in five days. Her husband and her two children, who also became infected, are still recovering. Despite the challenges, she believes her hospital is in a better place than many others. “I hope we all can survive this pandemic,” she said.

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Seoul heads for lockdown as infections spiral in South Korea

Another 1,378 cases on Friday as authorities warn new case numbers may nearly double by the end of July



People stand in line at a Covid-19 testing station in Seoul. Photograph: Yonhap/EPA

People stand in line at a Covid-19 testing station in Seoul. Photograph: Yonhap/EPA

Reuters

Sat 10 Jul 2021 00.28 EDT

South Korea posted its highest ever number of new daily Covid-19 infections within 24 hours, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency has said, in a third consecutive day of record high new infections.

Starting on Monday, coronavirus curbs will be tightened to the strictest level possible in Seoul and neighbouring regions for the first time.

The country reported 1,378 new Covid-19 cases as of midnight on Friday, up from Thursday's record of 1,316.

[South Korea raises Covid restrictions to highest level in Seoul](#)

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South Korea has so far fared better than many industrialised nations in infections and deaths, with a mortality rate of 1.22% and the number of severe cases at 148 as of Friday, which is much lower than the previous peak in late December.

However the rising trend has prompted a warning that new case numbers may nearly double by the end of July.

That has led to tougher curbs by the government including people being advised to stay home as much as possible and social gatherings restricted to two people after 6pm from four earlier in the day.

About 11% of South Korea's 52 million people have completed vaccination, including receiving both shots for vaccines requiring two doses, while 30% have received one dose, KDCA said in a statement.

The country aims to reach herd immunity before November by inoculating 70% of the public with at least one shot by September.

South Korea's total Covid-19 infections to date stand at 166,722 with 2,038 deaths.

The Delta variant is responsible [for a growing wave of new cases in the region](#), which had previously managed the pandemic with some success, and the slow pace of vaccinations in countries including [South Korea](#), Australia and Thailand is causing concern.

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Covid ‘freedom day’ means nothing of the sort for clinically vulnerable people

[Laura Elliott](#)

When restrictions and facemasks are relaxed in England on 19 July, millions of us will be effectively forced back into lockdown



‘Dropping social distancing measures will mean that many of our neighbours are trapped in an unofficial lockdown.’ A Covid safety sign in Staines, Surrey, June 2021. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

‘Dropping social distancing measures will mean that many of our neighbours are trapped in an unofficial lockdown.’ A Covid safety sign in Staines, Surrey, June 2021. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 10 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

When the first lockdown was announced, it was a surprise to discover I’d been left off the government’s shielding list. As the keeper of an unholy

alliance of chronic illnesses, including myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), [Ehlers-Danlos syndrome](#) and episodic ataxia, I'd at least expected to be warned to be careful. But although the government forgot about me – just as they forgot about [2 million other vulnerable people](#) in England – my GP didn't. She firmly advised me to treat myself as a shielder. And since my disabilities meant I was already working from home, I was in a much better position to shield than many other people.

For the 3.7 million people across England who are classed as clinically vulnerable, and the millions more of us who were left off the official list, being overlooked has occurred with a depressing regularity over the past 16 months. It therefore came as little surprise that, when Boris Johnson announced England's social distancing measures [would end on 19 July](#), the government had seemingly forgotten about the impact this would have on clinically vulnerable and immunocompromised people.

[England's 'freedom day' to be day of fear for elderly people, charities warn](#)
[Read more](#)

New guidance for shielders is expected to come from the department of health – yet news of this announcement has only been [trailed to journalists](#), and vulnerable people have not received any direct advice yet. Since the start of the pandemic, around [six in 10 coronavirus deaths in England](#) have been among disabled people. This has as much to do with government neglect and healthcare discrimination as it does with the virus itself. So while “Freedom Day” began to trend on Twitter following the announcement, my feed was filled with people trying to come to terms with having been cast aside yet again.

While lockdowns and restrictions have waxed and waned for most people, for shielders, this pandemic has been one long and unending lockdown punctuated by periods of increased risk. Every time lockdown has ended or restrictions have been eased, many shielders have been forced to choose between endangering their health by going back into workplaces, or losing their jobs to keep themselves safe.

For many of us, the vaccine rollout was the first hint of light at the end of a very long tunnel. But only half of the British population is fully vaccinated,

and while many vulnerable older adults have received both jabs, younger people like me who were left off the official list have only just accessed our first. Clinically vulnerable children under 16 aren't eligible for vaccination yet.

In this context, the government's reckless decision to make mask-wearing optional, scrap the one-metre distancing rule and open up nightclubs sends a clear message: once again, they're willing to sacrifice the lives and freedoms of vulnerable people across England to appease the empty god of the economy.

[Keir Starmer: tweaking NHS Covid app ‘like taking batteries out of smoke alarm’](#)

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While many people are getting ready to tear off their masks and crowd together in nightclubs, disabled people and their families are readying ourselves to choose between work or health, money or safety, and life or death. With UK coronavirus cases already up from [2,000 a day in May](#) to 32,000 a day in the past week, it seems possible that 19 July will not only mean a forgotten lockdown for vulnerable people, but in the coming months, further lockdown measures for everyone else if the virus spreads like wildfire through a partially or unvaccinated population.

The frustrating thing is that it doesn't have to be this way. No one wants another lockdown – least of all those of us who never really left one. Johnson claims this policy shift marks the beginning of us learning to live with the virus, yet social distancing measures have enabled us to do exactly that. No matter what ministers claim, we can't live with it by pretending it doesn't exist. Measures such as masks are a minor price to pay when the alternative is millions of vulnerable people not being able to enter public spaces.

Society isn't made up of isolated individuals who have no impact on each other. How each of us behaves affects other people. If dropping social distancing measures means that many of our neighbours are trapped in an unofficial lockdown, can we really claim to have been liberated at all?

- Laura Elliott is a writer, journalist and disability campaigner based in Sheffield
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The dweeb and the hot girl: Matt Hancock's affair belongs to an 80s movie

[Hadley Freeman](#)



Who knows, perhaps Hancock's entire career was just a ploy to entice his university crush



Matt Hancock and Gina Coladangelo in July 2020. Photograph: Tom Bowles/Shutterstock

Matt Hancock and Gina Coladangelo in July 2020. Photograph: Tom Bowles/Shutterstock

Sat 10 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

Among the many, many words that have been spoken and written by now about [Matt Hancock](#)'s relationship with his colleague and university friend, Gina Coladangelo, I don't think anyone has said this: isn't this a bit like an 80s movie? I get why people keep saying it smacks of a return to 90s Tory sleaze, but I think they are focusing on the details as opposed to the bigger picture. The 80s movie picture.

First, the background. As well as cheating on and now leaving Martha, his wife of 15 years – whom he was also at university with – he allegedly [managed to give her long Covid](#), which she still has. You know, not enough men think about the details, the final twist that makes the real difference. So you gotta hand it to Hancock: when it came to doing over his wife, he really put the cherry on that cake.

Further revealing details have emerged from the interviews in tabloids with Hancock's university contemporaries about their memories of him and

Coladangelo back in the mesozoic age of the late 1990s. “Gina Coladangelo ‘was way out of Matt Hancock’s league at uni’ says fellow student” was [one typical headline](#), although that is the kind of revelation even those of us who had never even heard Coladangelo’s name until two weeks ago could have come up with. But the story got better: “Gina was very suave, composed and elegant. Most men would have given their right arm to go out with her,” said Maxie Allen. I’ve never encountered a suave, elegant or even composed 18-year-old, but Coladangelo does have that air about her. Incidentally, isn’t there something so pleasing about the fact that she’s married to the man behind Oliver Bonas, the most zeitgeisty high street store there is? It’s as if a member of John Major’s cabinet was caught shagging Mrs Kookai.

So while Coladangelo was the hot catch, Hancock, according to Allen, “was not the sort of person where he’d come into a room and everyone went: ‘Oh Matt Hancock’s here’”.

Are you seeing now where I’m going with my 80s movie reference? On the one hand, we have Hancock, the dweeby nobody (played, surely, by Anthony Michael Hall), and on the other, we have Coladangelo, the college princess (Molly Ringwald is the obvious choice, although I’d prefer Ally Sheedy in this role). Boy, did Hancock play the long game here! Lord knows I’ve done some crazy things to try to get a crush to notice me – thrown parties, bought expensive clothes, pretended I could cook – but at least I never gave any of them slightly dodgy jobs and a salary, forcing them to hang out with me. Who knows, perhaps Hancock’s entire career was just a ploy to attract the attention of his university crush. If so, (a) that explains a lot; and (b) while I cannot condone Hancock’s deception of his wife, I do salute his tenacity.

[Reviving Friends is like getting back together with your ex: a bad idea | Hadley Freeman](#)

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The fantasy of the Hot Girl (or Boy) is a powerful one. That ultimate prize, the person who is blatantly out of your league, but who, if they notice you, will validate your entire being: it’s one of the oldest cliches in movies, from the [blond woman in Wayne’s World](#) who makes Garth want to hurl, to the self-explanatory 2010 comedy, [She’s Out of My League](#). Eighties movies

perfected this, especially in the school setting, from Ringwald finally snogging Andrew McCarthy in Pretty In Pink to John Cusack running away to England with Ione Skye in Say Anything. It is a very teenage idea of validation that few adults ever fully leave behind. Why do any of us go to school reunions 20 years on, but to show our long-ago unrequited crush how much more confident and fabulous we are now? And if you're now a government minister as opposed to the anonymous nobody you once were, you'd better believe you're going to let them know about it, even if you have to bloody well hire them. "This wouldn't have happened if he wasn't the health secretary and she wasn't lobbying. That is blatantly obvious to anyone who knew them," their university friend claimed.

As I write this, "friends of Hancock" are insisting he and Coladangelo are "a love match". But if Hancock had watched more 80s movies, he would know that getting together with your longstanding crush doesn't always lead to the expected happily ever after. In Teen Wolf, Michael J Fox realises that social-climbing Pamela only likes him now because he's a werewolf (possibly a metaphor for health secretary), and he's better off with his loyal childhood pal, the oddly named Boof. In Peggy Sue Got Married, Kathleen Turner learns that sexy poet Michael is actually a prat and she's better off sticking with goofy Nicolas Cage. Can reality ever measure up to a fantasy of 20 years? Is anything worth becoming a national laughingstock? Hancock had better hope so. Because only in 80s movies can you go back in time and fix your massive mistakes.

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OpinionEuro 2020

We can't keep politics out of sport, but please keep politicians out of football

Marina Hyde



As the government piggybacks on England's success, remember how it took on footballers – and lost – in the pandemic



'Politicians and the football ... A marriage made in the realms of guaranteed ridicule.' Photograph: Frank Augstein/Reuters

'Politicians and the football ... A marriage made in the realms of guaranteed ridicule.' Photograph: Frank Augstein/Reuters

Fri 9 Jul 2021 09.41 EDT

Did you see the prime minister in the fancy seats at Wembley on Wednesday? He seemed to have come dressed as a particularly brutal Matt Lucas impersonation of himself. As for the young lady standing to his left and smiling indulgently at him, it's nice that his ... carer, is it? ... takes him out for the day and buys him a football top. But I do hope there weren't tears in the car on the way home when Boris Johnson was told he wasn't going to be allowed to run on to the pitch and do one of his special footer kicks on Sunday. (There certainly wasn't a mask in the car on the way home, as photos of Johnson show , but I guess it's only the help that catches it that way, so ... basically victimless.)

Politicians and the football, then. A marriage made in the realms of guaranteed ridicule. Yet still they come. Or, in the case of Lee Anderson,

still they stay away. Lee is one of the breakout plonkers of the tournament, being the Ashfield MP who early on announced that he'd be boycotting all England games because taking the knee was Marxist or something. One of the great achievements of Gareth Southgate has been bubbling his squad so fastidiously that no player has yet found out they are being boycotted by Lee. Should this hermetic seal hold up to and including Sunday's final, analysts believe that ignorance will amount if not to bliss, then certainly to an extra yard of pace on every England forward.

Meanwhile, as England have progressed, Lee's self-sabotaging stance has brought increasing gaiety to the nation, with his latest media appearance a masterclass in a particular variety of male sulk. He still wouldn't be watching the first major final England have been in since 1966, he [told LBC](#), but would instead spend the game "unpacking boxes". Thoughts and prayers with Lee. There does seem to be an awful lot to unpack with him.

It's quite something to think that the government went into the first lockdown last year attempting to [score cheap points](#) on footballers' pay. They are now exiting all restrictions desperately trying to piggyback on what footballers have brought to the country, despite Johnson having managed England's pandemic like Steve McLaren.

This, needless to say, does not tell the entire story of the government's encounters with football over the past year and a quarter. It all began last April with a pious little lecture from a guy by the name of Matt Hancock – remember him? At the time he was spouting off, Hancock was the health secretary still allowing hospital patients to be discharged to care homes without even being tested. Priorities, priorities. "I think the first thing Premier League footballers can do is make a contribution," [intoned Matt](#), from his Downing Street podium. "Take a pay cut and play their part." Incredibly, it would take a full 15 months for Matt himself to take a pay cut, but at least Certain Events mean we're spared his ministerial take on "the Three Lions" now. I'm not sure I could handle a broadcast round featuring Matt honking "I do believe it is coming home, but I urge people to bring it home responsibly!"

Next up for the government and football were two bruising clashes against Marcus Rashford (they lost both), and the awards of MBEs for services to

charity to both Rashford and Jordan Henderson. Spring brought some posturing about the European Super League that seemed deeply questionable, coming as it did days after the chief executive of one of the clubs involved had visited Johnson's chief of staff for a meeting in Downing Street. And the curtain-raiser to this tournament was of course a load of mealy mouthed failure on behalf of ministers to condemn the booing of players taking the knee, apparently to stoke their horribly ill-advised culture wars. Today, England players are [reported](#) to be planning to donate any Euro 2020 winners bonuses to the NHS should they triumph, and are already donating all their match fees. Why don't these pampered, selfish etcetera-etceteras do something worthwhile with their cash, like buy Boris Johnson some more gold wallpaper or another holiday to Mustique?

Arguably, then, the government has had an absolute shitter against football this pandemic. But instead of owning it – which Lee Anderson is at least doing in his mad, sad, way – we now see ministers in full reverse-ferret mode. Thursday brought [eight tweets](#) of excruciating faux apology from the failed politician Laurence Fox, who now seems to regret his decision to tip all over England's "woke babies".

What is to be done to stop this? I believe that all politicians should simply be fitted with an electric collar for the duration of any tournament, which administers shocks of increasing intensity each time they mention the subject, and a full 300 megavolts if they deploy the words "it's coming home".

[Will Euro 2020 change England for ever? I've heard it all before | Joseph Harker](#)
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That, of course, would be rather a mild sort of just deserts for Priti Patel, widely believed to administer the electrodes to a subordinate for bringing her the wrong coffee, or for failing to be "can do" about some plan to install artificially grown megalodons in the Channel to deter migrant boats. Patel was early out of the traps on the football front this summer, pointedly arguing that fans had a right to boo the team taking the knee and dismissing the practice as "gesture politics". Or as Priti now puts it, in a [tweet](#) accompanying pictures of her baring her teeth in an England strip: "Just

brilliant. Well done Three Lions. Football's coming home." Oh dear. It's not yet clear if football is coming home, but the chickens certainly are.

You can even [read](#) this morning that the government is worried they might "jinx" the final if they commit to a bank holiday to celebrate an England win. In which case, I think the message to them must be very clear. Namely: don't worry. PLEASE don't worry. Nothing you do, ever, at all, has any effect on it either way. None of it is for you, none of it owes anything to you, and nothing you say about it should be taken with anything other than a laugh and a cordial four-letter invitation to shut up, for ever. We can't keep politics out of sport, and nor should we seek to. The two are entwined and always have been, just not in the way the various blazers want. But we should always, always keep politicians out of sport – because the one thing you can absolutely guarantee is that no matter what happens on Sunday, they'll be painting footballers as the enemy again soon enough. Set your watch by it.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Friendship](#)

Are friendships really being destroyed by Britain's divided politics?

Gaby Hinsliff



When I think of my old friend and the gulf between us, I realise these relationships are about more than our beliefs



Two friends meet by Chalkwell beach, Southend-on-Sea, March 2021.
Photograph: John Keeble/Getty Images

Two friends meet by Chalkwell beach, Southend-on-Sea, March 2021.
Photograph: John Keeble/Getty Images

Fri 9 Jul 2021 10.00 EDT

I have a friend – let's call her Zoe, although it's not her name – with whom I increasingly disagree about most things.

We are at odds over lockdown, over Brexit, and I daren't even ask about more incendiary matters. But I like her, all the same. We have known each other for almost 30 years, had children at the same exhausted time, and soldiered through similar professional trenches with hideous bosses and groping colleagues and all the obstacles that litter women's careers, propping each other up along the way. We were always chalk and cheese, but she's funny and clever and I still constantly remind myself of one characteristically blunt but useful piece of advice she gave me. Yet striving to remain friends can sometimes feel like yearning for something that isn't going to come back.

Are friendships like this dying? This week Frank Luntz, the US pollster (and old university friend of Boris Johnson) newly installed at the Centre for

Policy Studies thinktank, [grabbed headlines](#) with an argument that Britons are “writing each other off and out of our lives” as relationships crack under the strain of ideological divides. His [research](#) found half of under-30s and a third of over-30s have stopped talking to someone for voicing a political opinion, prompting some hand-wringing about cancel culture and whether younger people are now too censorious to tolerate differences of opinion. (The over-50s were significantly less likely to have had such a falling out, although maybe they just did their social culling decades ago and now move in smaller but more like-minded circles).

But while a recent Ipsos Mori [study](#) did find evidence that progressives were less tolerant than rightwingers of political differences within their friendships – people who support Black Lives Matter or trans rights were less likely to say they could be friends with someone who didn’t than vice versa, and remainers less likely than leavers – the doom feels strangely overdone, and in danger of normalising something that still isn’t actually the norm.

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Respondents weren’t asked about friendships specifically, but whether they’d ever stopped talking to *someone* in real life or online. Does muting some aggressive stranger on Twitter count? Because that’s not cancelling, it’s self-preservation, like escaping a belligerent drunk at a party. What about avoiding your once beloved uncle on Facebook, because he’s become a diehard anti-vaxxer and nobody can face another argument about Bill Gates, yet still considering him your beloved uncle because ... well, he is? Sometimes keeping a distance can be a form of tolerance, a way of stretching the elastic rather than snapping it: put off a final rupture for long enough and maybe they’ll return to their senses first. But above all, the figures feel meaningless without knowing how many people have stopped talking to someone for reasons that had nothing to do with politics.

Something said in the heat of the moment that can’t be taken back; a new partner nobody else can stand; a flatshare that went sour or, worst of all, a mysterious, unexplained ghosting. And then there are the painful endings

caused by lives going in different directions. You had children while they burned through cycle after cycle of failed IVF, or perhaps their career went stratospheric while yours stalled. But Luntz's research also stopped short of surely the most interesting question, which is how many of those who have stopped talking to someone now regret it, or want to patch things up but don't know how. Sometimes this kind of lost friendship can feel like a bereavement, more painful than any relationship breakup. Romance may come and go, but friends are meant to last for ever, which makes it all the more distressing when suddenly they become estranged.

This has been a testing year for friendships. Tensions that could once have been defused over a couple of beers festered through the physical separation of lockdown; paranoia crept all too easily into the reading of hastily dashed-off WhatsApps, while social media skirmishes have loomed larger among those sitting around with nothing else to do. Covid itself has driven new wedges between cautious rule-takers and friends more willing to take chances, now that all social invites must be weighed not just against the cap on numbers but against everyone's varying appetites for risk, and what some might quite literally be bringing to the party as a result. But being starved of company has perhaps also forced many people to think harder about exactly what and whom they miss.

Old friendships are the thread connecting us with a younger self or a past that isn't wholly lost so long as someone else remembers it, which is why severing them can feel like losing a limb. And that's why I have not given up on my friend. I just keep biding my time, hoping vaguely that something will change, that one day the friendship can be properly resuscitated, as if it had been a critically ill patient put into a coma for its own good. Perhaps the pessimists are right, and we really are becoming a nation divided, ideological differences pushing us ever further apart. But my hunch is that we're at least as often a nation trying and failing and trying again to bridge the gap, both sides constantly resolving to make the phone call, hanging back only because nobody knows quite where to start.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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US weather

US west heatwave: 31m people brace for record-breaking temperatures

Las Vegas could surpass its record-high of 117F as residents of US west face very high risk of heat-related illness



The state's largest urban centers, including Los Angeles, are along the coast, won't endure the extreme highs. Photograph: MediaNews Group/Los Angeles Daily News/Getty Images

The state's largest urban centers, including Los Angeles, are along the coast, won't endure the extreme highs. Photograph: MediaNews Group/Los Angeles Daily News/Getty Images

Victoria Bekiempis

Fri 9 Jul 2021 19.29 EDT

More than 31 million people across the US west and south-west are bracing for a brutal heatwave that could bring triple-digit temperatures this weekend, with authorities [warning](#) that records could be broken in many regions of

California and Nevada. Officials [have said](#) that Las Vegas could even surpass its record-high temperature of 117F (47C).

The “heat risk” is classified as “very high” across much of this area, meaning all residents there face “very high risk of heat-related illness due to both the long duration heat, and the lack of overnight relief”, the National Weather Service (NWS) [has said](#).

[Record-breaking US Pacific north-west heatwave killed almost 200 people](#)

[Read more](#)

While the heat risk is slightly lower in places at higher elevations – classified as “high” or “moderate” – most of the population remains at risk for heat-related illnesses, especially persons “who are sensitive to heat and/or those without adequate cooling or hydration,” according to the NWS.

In California, inland areas are [expected](#) to reel from the heatwave. The state’s largest urban centers, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, are along the coast, so they will see benefits from ocean cooling, and not endure the extreme highs.

“Temperatures are going to be about 10 degrees above normal for this time of year,” Diana Crofts-Pelayo, a spokesperson for California’s office of emergency services, said earlier this week. “This will be a record-setting heatwave.”

This heatwave comes in the wake of record highs across Pacific north-west states and western Canada last week. The heat-related [death toll](#) in Oregon and Washington has risen to a total of nearly 200 people; as many as [500 persons](#) are believed to have died in British Columbia.

On Friday, officials in Washington state announced emergency rules that provide farm workers and others who work outdoors more protection from hot weather. Under the new rules, when the temperature is at or above 100F (38C), employers must provide shade or another way for employees to cool down and ensure a paid cool-down rest period of at least 10 minutes every two hours.

“The heat experienced in our state this year has reached catastrophic levels,” the Washington governor, Jay Inslee, said. “The physical risk to individuals is significant, in particular those whose occupations have them outdoors all day.”

Officials are urging residents to stay inside, seek air conditioning, and drink water; some counties are opening cooling centers. The California Independent System Operator, which runs most of this state’s power grid, has asked residents to conserve power in the evening on Friday to lessen stress on the electrical system, citing “extreme heat forecasted across much of California into early next week”.

The US west and south-west were also gripped by a heatwave in June, with at least 48 million under a heat advisory. The dangerous heat is also coupled with extreme drought conditions, ramping up the already heightened risk of wildfires.

California’s wildfire season is already more extreme than in 2020. Officials say the length of fire season has increased by 75 days across the Sierras, in keeping with an uptick in the extent of forest fires statewide.

According to Weather.com, there have been 4,599 wildfires that started in California since 1 January, igniting 115 sq miles (30,000ha). In the same period of 2020, there were 3,847 fires burning 48.6 sq miles.

On Friday, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced that June 2021 was “the hottest” on record for the US. The Noaa says that “heatwaves from coast to coast helped push” June over the top.

The average June temperature across the contiguous US hit 72.6F (22.5C), 4.2F over average. Noaa says that Arizona, California, Idaho, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Utah experienced their hottest June on record.

The Associated Press contributed reporting

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Taliban sweep through Herat province as Afghan advance continues

Fears grow for Kabul government after militant group seizes two key border crossings



Afghan militia gather with their weapons in Herat to support the security forces against the Taliban on Friday. Photograph: Hoshang Hashimi/AFP/Getty Images

Afghan militia gather with their weapons in Herat to support the security forces against the Taliban on Friday. Photograph: Hoshang Hashimi/AFP/Getty Images

[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) in Kabul and [Akhtar Mohammad Makooi](#) in Herat
Fri 9 Jul 2021 10.57 EDT

The Taliban has swept through western Herat province, seizing [two key border crossings](#) to Iran and Turkmenistan, and much of the countryside beyond city limits.

It was the latest part of [Afghanistan](#) to collapse in the face of a rapid militant advance, during which they have taken control of areas far beyond their original southern strongholds. Their speed has fuelled fears the government in Kabul could fall within months.

In Herat, the civil war era warlord Ismail Khan called up his supporters overnight, and deployed armed units to guard key parts of the city and its outskirts. He is in his mid-70s, but called on all armed men in the city to join the fight and promised to go to the frontline himself.

“You can now see hundreds of armed men at my house, thousands gathered since yesterday, with the help of God we will go to the battlefield by this evening, and change the situation,” he said in a video shared on social media. Pictures showed gunmen massing in his courtyard.

Abdullah Abdullah, the head of the Afghan government’s peace council, admitted that while the mobilisation of militias like Khan’s was “not the best option under normal circumstances” it was now vital to preventing a [Taliban](#) takeover.

If the Taliban advance is not stopped, the group will never sit down for serious negotiations, he added. The peace talks he is leading for the government have been stalled for months.

One regional official said most of Herat province, bar the city and two nearby districts, Gozara and Injil, was now under Taliban control. Previously the insurgents had full command of only one of Herat’s 18 districts, Obe, although they had a heavy presence elsewhere.

Another senior Herat official said that the situation had been extremely dangerous on Thursday, but by Friday militias and security forces had thrown a cordon around greater Herat and the city and its airport were well protected.

A spokesman for the Taliban said they would allow cross-border commerce to continue as normal through multiple outposts they had seized in the north and west, which would provide a lucrative flow of revenue.

“All borders now in IEA [Taliban] control will remain open and functional,” spokesman Suhail Shaheen said on Twitter. The group already holds the main northern crossing to Tajikistan, in northern Badakhshan, which reopened soon after changing hands.

On Thursday evening the Taliban shared video of themselves at Islam Qala border crossing, the main artery for trade with Iran. They then took control of the nearby Torghundi crossing to Turkmenistan, including customs, intelligence and police buildings.

Last month, as they raced through northern provinces and sent more than 1,000 troops fleeing to neighbouring Tajikistan, they also took Shir Khan Bandar, the main crossing for that region, about 30 miles north of the city of Kunduz.

Shaheen also said the Taliban would not target “diplomats, embassies, NGOs and their staff”. All those groups have been hit by militant attacks in the past, so the claim was met with scepticism.

Several countries have closed down consulates in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, including Turkey and Russia, as fighters closed in around its outskirts, leaving the urban areas besieged and isolated.

It is a pattern repeated across Afghanistan in recent weeks, with the Taliban seizing territory up to the edge of big towns and cities, but not moving into them. Their only attempt to take a provincial capital, Qala e Nau in western Badghis, was repelled after heavy fighting this week.

Taliban officials said at a press conference in Moscow on Friday they had already taken control of 85% of Afghan territory. Government officials dismissed the figure as part of a propaganda campaign.

Senior military and international officials estimate the group now controls nearly half of the 400 districts in Afghanistan, and is fighting in many

others. It does not hold any of the major urban areas.

But the fact the Taliban could make such a bold claim, the day after the US president, Joe Biden, [confirmed a 31 August deadline](#) for the final departure of American troops, is testament to their military success over the last few weeks.

Biden shrugged off the Taliban's progress when he confirmed the target date for officially finalising the US withdrawal. He said troops had gone to Afghanistan to root out al-Qaida and prevent another attack on the US, and had achieved that goal.

The transfer of Bagram airbase last week has already put an effective halt to any significant US operations in the country, although Washington has promised drones and long-range jets will still offer some air support.

The Taliban appear to have taken neighbours and allies by surprise with their advance, as well as the opposition in Kabul. This week Tajikistan ordered 20,000 reservists to reinforce its border with Afghanistan, and Russia said on Friday the Taliban now controls about two-thirds of that frontier.

A Russian foreign ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, urged all sides to "show restraint". Iran has also this week hosted unofficial peace talks, a long-term proposal which was only finalised after the last few weeks' advances.

At international negotiations the Taliban have presented themselves as changed from the brutal ideologues who ruled Afghanistan 25 years ago, when they barred women from work and education and enforced a strict form of sharia law with punishments including stoning and amputation.

They have promised to respect women's rights under Islam, and frequently talk about the importance of protecting lives.

Yet the group has driven civilians from their homes and looted and burned property in northern Afghanistan, in apparent retaliation for cooperating with the government, Human Rights Watch warned in a new report.

Residents of Bagh-e Sherkat in Kunduz province said the attacks came in late June. The Taliban said locals had been ordered to leave “for their own safety” during fighting and denied damaging property.

The attacks are an “ominous warning about the risk of future atrocities,” said [Patricia Gossman](#), the associate Asia director of Human Rights Watch. “The Taliban leadership has the power to stop these abuses by their forces but haven’t shown that they are willing to do so.”

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US foreign policy

‘We expect them to act’: Biden presses Putin on ransomware groups, hints at retaliation

Joe Biden’s hour-long phone call with the Russian leader suggests growing impatience over attacks disrupting US sectors



Joe Biden told reporters even if a ransomware operation coming from Russia was not state sponsored, ‘we expect them to act if we give them enough information’. Photograph: Alex Edelman/EPA

Joe Biden told reporters even if a ransomware operation coming from Russia was not state sponsored, ‘we expect them to act if we give them enough information’. Photograph: Alex Edelman/EPA

Reuters

Fri 9 Jul 2021 22.59 EDT

Joe Biden has increased pressure on [Vladimir Putin](#) to move against ransomware groups operating from Russia, warning the United States is prepared to respond if cyberhacks are not stopped.

The two leaders held an hour-long phone call on Friday, their first since they [discussed ransomware attacks at a summit](#) in Geneva on 16 June. Biden's message to Putin in the call was direct, suggesting a growing impatience over attacks that have disrupted key US sectors.

[Biden warns US will hit back if Russia continues with cyber strikes](#)
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"I made it very clear to him that the United States expects, when a ransomware operation is coming from his soil even though it's not sponsored by the state, we expect them to act if we give them enough information to act on who that is," Biden told reporters.

He said the two governments have now set up a means to communicate on a regular basis "when each of us thinks something is happening in another country that affects the home country".

"And so it went well. I'm optimistic," he said.

The United States has not indicated how it plans to respond to the attacks emanating from [Russia](#), but Biden hinted at digital retaliation if Russian cooperation was not forthcoming.

Asked by a Reuters reporter whether it would make sense to attack the Russian servers used in such intrusions, Biden paused, smiled and said: "Yes."

Biden told reporters there would be consequences to Russian inaction, but gave no details. He said a joint meeting had been set for 16 July, adding, "I believe we're going to get cooperation."

[Biden announces investigation into international ransomware attack](#)
[Read more](#)

A senior [Biden administration](#) official said a response could come soon. “We’re not going to telegraph what those actions will be precisely – some of them will be manifest and visible, some of them may not be – but we expect those to take place, you know, in the days and weeks ahead,” the official told reporters.

Ransomware is a breed of malicious software that hackers use to hold data hostage in exchange for payment. Cybercriminals have used it to paralyze thousands of American organisations and businesses around the world, setting off a series of increasingly high-profile crises.

Many of the gangs carrying out the ransomware attacks are alleged by American officials and cybersecurity researchers to be operating out of Russia with the awareness, if not the approval, of the government there.

The White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said on Friday that the United States had no new information suggesting the Russian government directed [last week’s ransomware attack on Florida IT firm Kaseya](#) by prolific cybercrime syndicate REvil, but said Moscow had a responsibility to take action against such groups operating in Russia.

Moscow and Washington disagreed over whether the United States had formally sought Russian assistance to rein in ransomware attacks.

[FBI director sees ‘parallels’ between ransomware threat and 9/11](#)
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A Kremlin statement said Putin told Biden that Russia “had not received any requests from the relevant US departments in the last month despite the readiness of the Russian side to jointly stop crime in the sphere of information”.

The senior Biden administration official disputed this statement, telling reporters in a conference call that multiple requests had been made by the United States to Russia through normal diplomatic channels.

Internet crime has bedevilled US-Russian relations since the 1990s, when American cyber experts first began complaining of spam emails from

Russia. But the disruptive power of ransomware has taken the issue to a new level.

In May cybercriminals alleged to be operating from Russia froze the operations of [critical fuel transport group Colonial pipeline](#), setting off gasoline shortages, price spikes and panic buying on the US East Coast.

The following month a different Russia-linked group, [REvil, struck meatpacker JBS](#), briefly disrupting its food supply chain. Last week the same group claimed responsibility for a mass ransomware outbreak centered on Kaseya.

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[Wildlife](#)

Bear attack: rangers shoot killer grizzly in night vision ambush

Wildlife officials in Montana stake out chicken coop visited by same grizzly that fatally mauled camper



Bear trap set in the camping area where Leah Davis Lokan was killed by a grizzly. Photograph: Tom Bauer/AP

Bear trap set in the camping area where Leah Davis Lokan was killed by a grizzly. Photograph: Tom Bauer/AP

Associated Press in Helena

Fri 9 Jul 2021 21.48 EDT

A grizzly bear that pulled a California woman from her tent and killed her has been fatally shot by wildlife officials, who used night-vision goggles to stake out a chicken coop it had also raided near the small [Montana](#) town of Ovando.

They shot the bear shortly after midnight on Friday when it approached a trap set near the coop about two miles from Ovando where 65-year-old Leah

Davis Lokan of Chico, California, was killed on Tuesday, said Greg Lemon with Montana Fish, [Wildlife](#) and Parks.

Lokan, a nurse, was on a mountain biking trip. She and two companions were camping behind the Ovando post office when she was attacked.

The estimated 400-pound (181kg) bear awakened Lokan and her companions in a nearby tent about 3am on Tuesday, officials said. After the bear ran away, the campers removed food from their tents, secured it and went back to sleep, Montana wildlife officials said.

[Grizzly bear attack kills person at campsite in western Montana](#)

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About 15 minutes later the bear was seen on a video camera at a business about a block away from the post office, wildlife officials said. About 4.15am the sheriff's office received a 911 call after two people in a tent near the victim's were awakened by sounds of the attack, Roselles said. They used bear spray, and the animal ran away.

The bear is also believed to have entered a chicken coop in town that night, killing and eating several chickens. Authorities hunted it over three days, using helicopters and searchers on the ground and setting out five large traps made from steel culverts and baited with roadkill. "Based on the size of the bear, the colour of the bear and the nature of the chicken coop raids, we're confident we've got the offending bear," Lemon said.

Bears that attack people are not always killed if the mauling resulted from a surprise encounter or the bear was defending its young. But the bear involved in Lokan's death was considered a public safety threat.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/10/bear-attack-rangers-shoot-killer-grizzly-in-night-vision-ambush>



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[Huawei](#)

Huawei finance chief faces setback in fight against US extradition

Vancouver judge denies bid by Meng Wanzhou to add over 300 HSBC documents to her legal battle



Meng Wanzhou, seen here outside court in Vancouver last month, has been held under house arrest in the Canadian city since December 2018.
Photograph: Jennifer Gauthier/Reuters

Meng Wanzhou, seen here outside court in Vancouver last month, has been held under house arrest in the Canadian city since December 2018.
Photograph: Jennifer Gauthier/Reuters

Staff and agencies in Vancouver

Fri 9 Jul 2021 18.58 EDT

A Canadian judge has denied an application by Meng Wanzhou, the [Huawei](#) chief financial officer, to add documents her legal team received from HSBC as evidence to her US extradition case, the judge announced on Friday.

Meng, 49, is facing extradition from [Canada](#) to the US on charges of bank fraud for allegedly misleading HSBC about Huawei's business dealings in Iran, potentially causing the bank to break US sanctions. She has been held under house arrest in Vancouver since December 2018, when she was first detained.

[Huawei lawyers claim emails prove US has no grounds to extradite CFO from Canada](#)

[Read more](#)

Her legal team received a trove of over 300 pages of internal documents from HSBC through a court in Hong Kong, which the defence argued should be entered as evidence [because they would disprove the basis for the extradition claim](#).

Associate chief justice Heather Holmes, who has been overseeing the case in the British Columbia supreme court since its inception, disagreed. Her reasons will be released in writing in approximately 10 days, she said.

“We respect the court’s ruling, but regret this outcome,” Huawei Canada said in a statement released after the ruling, insisting the documents showed HSBC was aware of Huawei’s business dealings in [Iran](#), proving that the US’s account of the case was “manifestly unreliable”.

Meng was arrested on a US warrant at Vancouver airport in late 2018, and has been battling extradition. Her detention infuriated the Chinese government and has helped drag relations between Beijing and Ottawa to their lowest point in years.

The US accuses [Huawei](#) of using a Hong Kong shell company called Skycom to sell equipment to Iran, in violation of US sanctions. It says Meng committed fraud by misleading HSBC about the company’s business dealings in Iran.

But Meng's lawyers argued that the documents from [HSBC](#) show Huawei was open about its links to Skycom.

Meng is to appear in court in early August. Her extradition hearings are scheduled to finish by the end of that month.

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England

‘It’s beautiful, it’s unbelievable’: England win sparks night of celebration

David Beckham, Adele and Dua Lipa salute team’s achievement as fans party in the wake of Euro 2020 semi final victory over Denmark



Fans celebrate on a bus in London after England defeated Denmark 2-1 on Wednesday to reach the Euro 2020 final. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Fans celebrate on a bus in London after England defeated Denmark 2-1 on Wednesday to reach the Euro 2020 final. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Martin Farrer](#) and agencies

Thu 8 Jul 2021 01.58 EDT

England fans are 90 minutes away from seeing the men's national team win a major tournament for the first time in more than half a century after Harry Kane sent the Three Lions to the [Euro 2020](#) final.

After the captain [scored the winning goal](#) on the rebound after his extra-time penalty had been saved, 60,000 fans in Wembley were sent into delirium along with millions of fans around the country.

03:33

'It's coming home': England fans go wild after team secures Euro 2020 final berth – video

The squad will play Italy in the decider at Wembley on Sunday night, the first major final for the men since the World Cup win over West Germany in 1966. England's women were losing finalists at Euro 1984 and 2009.



England fans celebrate at Leicester Square on Wednesday night. Photograph: Maciek Musialek/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Jubilant supporters, including the Duke of Cambridge, David Beckham and Wayne Rooney, celebrated inside Wembley as the crowd serenaded the team with the Three Lions (Football's Coming Home) anthem [and new fans' favourite, Sweet Caroline](#).

Joyful scenes were repeated outside the stadium. In pubs and fan zones, supporters lobbed several of the estimated 10m pints bought on Wednesday into the air in celebration, while others removed their shirts, embraced strangers, or simply wept.

2-1 ☺ C'MON ENGLAND!! IT'S COMING HOME!!
CONGRATULATIONS!! ☺ ☺ [#EATDRINKGOAL](#)
[#BOXPARKCroydon](#) pic.twitter.com/Fn2XokYUDA

— BOXPARK CROYDON (@BoxparkCroydon) [July 7, 2021](#)

Fans gathered in Trafalgar Square in central London after the final whistle, waving England flags and merging together in a huge crowd.

One supporter, Oliver Ways, 28, said: “This time it’s coming home, the momentum is with us, I don’t care what anyone says.

“The game was just how we wanted it. I can’t believe I’m saying this but England are in a final.”



Celebrations at the fan park in Manchester. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

Another England fan Vic Richards, 22, said: “I’m still trying to compute what happened, I’ve never seen England make a final.

“It’s beautiful, it’s unbelievable, I love this country, the players gave it their all. This is an historic occasion, we may never see this again – now we can start to believe.”



Fans celebrate the winning goal at Luna Springs in Birmingham.
Photograph: Jacob King/PA

There were also joyous scenes in Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham and many other towns and cities across the country.

'It's coming home!'

England sense destiny after beating Denmark to reach #EURO2020 final<https://t.co/9i5EF1t9mY>

□ Fans in Manchester celebrate as England reaches final
pic.twitter.com/3VwVkNaDIy

— AFP News Agency (@AFP) [July 8, 2021](#)

Incredible scenes in Newcastle city centre as fans celebrate England's win! #Euro2020 pic.twitter.com/A1NnLDQsYS

— The Chronicle (@ChronicleLive) [July 7, 2021](#)

Many fans tried to stay out late to enjoy the win, with a few dozen supporters in Leicester Square climbing on top of a number 9 double-decker bus to Aldwych, cheering and holding a St George's flag aloft before crowds were broken up by police.



Fans celebrate on a bus in central London after England defeated Denmark.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Met Police later said 20 arrests were made in London, with alleged offences including “common assault, public order and assault on police”.

After a night of high drama, former England captain Beckham joined the celebrities saluting the team’s achievement.

He wrote on Instagram: “Big night tonight and proud to have been stood there watching Gareth and the boys make history... Hard fight to the end, but wow was it worth it.. well done boys & well done to the incredible fans in the stadium and around the country what a night...”



England fans celebrate the win at the Trafalgar Square fan zone in London.
Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

The singer Adele shared a video of her wild celebrations at home sparked by Kane scoring the rebound from a penalty. She wrote on Instagram: "ITS BLOODY COMING HOME."

Pop star Dua Lipa shared pictures on Instagram from her watch party - including a plate of digestive biscuits and red crosses painted on her cheeks - and said: "IT'S COMING HOME."

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- Turn on sport notifications.

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Earlier, fans released red-coloured smoke and sang as they swarmed out of the stadium following England's win.

Addi Hassan, 21, described the win as "absolutely incredible, absolutely world class".

England fan Lucy Millard, both 18, was elated as she left Wembley, saying: "It's the first time in so many years we've been in the semi-finals so it's absolutely amazing. It's coming home."

And John Engall, 65, who was a schoolboy during England's only previous major triumph in 1966 said he felt "absolutely fantastic" after watching the match from Boxpark in Croydon.

"I remember 66 but I'm much more ecstatic now than when I was 10," he said. "It was a brilliant game, it could have gone either way but well, it seems to have gone our way."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jul/08/its-beautiful-its-unbelievable-england-win-sparks-celebrations-across-the-country>.



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Attempt to stay neutral abandoned as ITV pundits lose balance

Commentators and analysts don't even try to hide their joy over England's Euro 2020 semi-final win



The ITV analysis team at the semi-final (from left): Mark Pougatch, Roy Keane, Gary Neville and Ian Wright. Photograph: ITV

The ITV analysis team at the semi-final (from left): Mark Pougatch, Roy Keane, Gary Neville and Ian Wright. Photograph: ITV

Andy Hunter

@AHunterGuardian

Thu 8 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

The half-hearted attempt at restraint and balance had been admirable in the circumstances but the pretence collapsed along with Raheem Sterling when winning the penalty that took England into their first major final for 55 years.

“There is very little contact, but I don’t care,” said ITV co-commentator Lee Dixon, suitably falling to pieces inside his own box.

Alongside him, lead commentator Sam Matterface urged a nation to “feel it, ride it” and “open your eyes as wide as the Wembley arch”.

A night of unremitting tension dissolved into nonsensical fun and, having waited this long, who could really blame those trying to make sense of England enjoying luck and success at a major tournament?

Matterface and Dixon, a steady pairing minus the feel for a game or feelgood bonhomie of Clive Tyldesley and Ally McCoist, had maintained ITV’s fair and balanced coverage of England’s Euro 2020 semi-final against Denmark, a team with a cause after the cardiac arrest suffered by their finest player, Christian Eriksen, in their opening game.

Until the decisive moment of the entire game, that is. The excellent Sterling’s tumble was largely glossed over, even the fact that Denmark were playing the second half of extra time with 10 men barely got a mention, as emotion took centre stage and Ian Wright ended up singing Sweet Caroline through a cracked voice live on TV.

Throughout the night it had been difficult to tell whether this was a grand football occasion or a plug for the troubled music industry.

Bizarrely, [Roy Keane](#) had promoted the musical theme before kickoff with a rare show of his human side and the revelation he is a fan of Neil Diamond.

The Irishman, revelling in his detachment from the occasion, had attended a Diamond concert a decade ago.

“I ended up arguing with a woman next to me,” he recalled, to nobody’s great surprise. “She kept singing all the songs out loud so I ended up in a bit of trouble that night. A brilliant concert though.”

Music ran football close as the night’s dominant theme. Before the inevitable shot of David Baddiel and Frank Skinner singing along to Three Lions there was Stormzy and Dave interrupting a montage of England misery with an upbeat message to “Modern England”.

As Stormzy said: “1966, we love you man, but it’s time to move on. You too, Gareth.”

ITV liked it so much they showed the clip twice. We had footage of the Coldstream Guards playing Three Lions outside Clarence House too – there really was no escape – and an appearance from Diamond himself, wishing England luck for their “see-my” final from his home in Colorado.

As well he might, with England’s adoption of Sweet Caroline – something Northern Ireland supporters did years ago – working wonders for royalties.

There was an entire feature on Sweet Caroline that involved Gareth Southgate analysing the structure of the 1969 hit as though it was the Denmark defence.

Finally, one hour and eight minutes into the show, presenter [Mark Pougatch](#) announced: “Let’s talk about the football.”

But Wright could not. “It’s really hard to focus,” admitted a well-paid TV pundit. “I just want to watch the game.”

Fortunately, Emma Hayes was on hand to not only provide the tactical analysis that has separated her from the pack at this tournament, but to put Ashley Cole on the spot with a direct question on how Denmark could target Harry Maguire.

ITV had sought balance initially – with Denmark’s triumph at the 1992 Euros, Jan Molby and former refugee turned Danish international striker Nadia Nadim all featuring in the buildup – and there had been little jingoism until nerves crept in towards the end of normal time.

Criticism of English theatrics, or of the shameful booing of the Danish national anthem by some England fans before kickoff, was conspicuous by its absence. We were off instead to feel it and ride it.

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England fans celebrate Euro 2020 semi-final victory – in pictures

England fans celebrate in Trafalgar Square, London. Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

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‘The history boys’: joy unconfined as papers celebrate England’s victory

Footballers now have to match the ‘immortals of 1966’ after reaching their first final for 55 years



The front pages of the papers after England beat Denmark at Wembley on Wednesday night to reach the Euro 2020 final. Composite: Various

The front pages of the papers after England beat Denmark at Wembley on Wednesday night to reach the Euro 2020 final. Composite: Various

Martin Farrer

Wed 7 Jul 2021 20.45 EDT

The joy of England's footballers [reaching a major final](#) for the first time in 55 years is given due justice on the front pages of the papers – along with a sense of relief that the team finally managed to do the job.

The **Mirror**'s headline is simply “Finally” noting that Harry Kane’s winning goal means that “after 55 years of hurt Harry and his heroes beat the Danes ... now to match the immortals of 1966”.

Tomorrow's front page: FINALLY! [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
<https://t.co/GkTIKeAY8y> pic.twitter.com/pBxFxEWIXj

— The Mirror (@DailyMirror) [July 7, 2021](#)

The **Express** goes for “And finally” and adds “Now bring on Italy!” under a picture of the team celebrating Kane’s winning goal converted on the rebound after his penalty was saved by Danish keeper Kasper Schmeichel.

EXPRESS: ...and Finally [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/CMRYpaoA81

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [July 7, 2021](#)

The **Sun** picks up on the famous advertising slogan of the Danish beer Carlsberg with the headline “Probably the best feeling in the world”.

Yep... □ pic.twitter.com/933p6nrTMD

— The Sun (@TheSun) [July 7, 2021](#)

The **Guardian’s** front page is dominated by a picture of Kane wheeling away in triumph after his goal with the headline “England’s dreaming: now final awaits for first time since ‘66” over a piece by Jonathan Liew summing up the hopes of the nation.

Looking forward to Sunday’s final against Italy, he writes: “For this country’s long-suffering fans, there are still grimmer agonies ahead. But here, now, under dark skies and bright lights, England made us happy.”

Guardian front page, Thursday 8 July 2021 - England's dreaming: now final awaits for first time since '66 pic.twitter.com/VM7eOr0H10

— The Guardian (@guardian) [July 7, 2021](#)

The **Guardian’s** back page pictured a roaring Gareth Southgate accompanied by the headline: “Finally”.



Photograph: Guardian Sport back page

The **Telegraph** takes the long view back to the famous World Cup triumph of 1966 with the headline “The history boys” over another picture of the goal celebrations. It also boasts a 12-page supplement inside the paper.

The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'The history boys'[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Sign up for the Front Page newsletter<https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry>
pic.twitter.com/228bBRRRrc

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [July 7, 2021](#)

The **Times** also likes that perspective and goes with the splash headline “England make history”. Its chief football writer, Henry Winter, begins his match report: “England are in a final — a final! — and these are the strangest, rarest, and most beautiful of words to write, read or even imagine.”

The **Mail** says “Kane you believe it” as it describes a “night of drama” on which the team kept the country on the edge of their seats.

Thursday's [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#)
pic.twitter.com/iZNshfOAbC

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [July 7, 2021](#)

MAIL SPORT: King Kane [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/h8DNOtDOuW

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [July 7, 2021](#)

The **i** celebrates “Fairytale football” and the **Star’s** splash reads “Is this the greatest dream ever?” as it puts the fans’ experience at the forefront of its front page coverage.

Thursday's front page: Fairytale football [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

□ Harry Kane sends Three Lions into final
[@GARSIDEK](#)<https://t.co/jGitrdQRaF>

□ Wild celebrations across England [@HugoCDaniel](#)
<https://t.co/xvsjweMx2A>

□ Fans' faith restored [@olyduff](#) <https://t.co/A5XeieE5OO>
pic.twitter.com/a7Vw4wdk5p

— i newspaper (@theipaper) [July 7, 2021](#)

STAR: Is this the greatest dream ever [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/bwLHGHNs

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [July 7, 2021](#)

STAR SPORT: Finally! [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/gMeuiJ04vm

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [July 7, 2021](#)

And the **Metro** kept it simple, declaring the achievement was “worth the wait”.

METRO SPORT: Worth the Wait! [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/tQ0TzOpbPB

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [July 7, 2021](#)

Of the London editions, only the **Financial Times** resists lure of the football. It’s early edition leads with “Fintech Wise valued close to £9bn after record London direct listing”.

North of the border it’s a different story. The **Scotsman** leads on “Lockdown easing at risk as hospitals struggle” but it does have a picture of Southgate, the England manager, celebrating the win.

THE SCOT: Lockdown easing at risk as hospitals struggle
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) pic.twitter.com/blqCYtyHyv

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [July 7, 2021](#)

The **Record** also acknowledges the win with a modest picture of Kane at the top of the page.

Here is your first look at tomorrow's Daily Record front page!
[#scotpapers](#) [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [@hendopolis](#)
pic.twitter.com/lSJ3R69wUM

— The Daily Record (@Daily_Record) [July 7, 2021](#)

It was a different story in Denmark. On the front page of the news website Politiken was the headline: “The adventure is over”.

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World Health Organization

WHO warns of ‘epidemiological stupidity’ of early Covid reopening

Mike Ryan issues warning over letting people catch Covid earlier as England prepares for ‘big bang’ reopening

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01:43

WHO urges countries ‘not to lose gains’ by prematurely lifting Covid restrictions – video

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 12.15 EDT

As England moves towards an anticipated “big bang” lifting of coronavirus restrictions on 19 July, a senior [World Health Organization](#) official has warned countries to lift their Covid-19 restrictions slowly so as “not to lose the gains that [they] have made”.

The comments from the UN global health body’s head of emergencies, Mike Ryan, were not aimed directly at Boris Johnson’s much-trumpeted reopening. However, they will be interpreted as grist to the mill of those health experts who have been arguing that [England](#) is moving too fast at a time when infections are surging.

Ryan did, however, address reactions to Johnson’s announcement earlier this week amid claims by some that the new policy appeared to be to allow new infections on top of vaccinations so that the country could reach herd immunity, saying he did not believe that was the intention.

Ryan said the idea of letting people get infected with Covid-19 earlier rather than later was “epidemiological stupidity”.

[World reacts cautiously to Boris Johnson’s ‘reckless’ Covid plans](#)

[Read more](#)

His comments came at a briefing where the WHO once again urged countries to share Covid-19 vaccines to protect health and care workers and elderly and vulnerable people in low-income countries before expanding vaccination programmes to children.

Addressing the speed of countries’ plans to reopen, Ryan added that in particular countries with low Covid-19 vaccination rates, combined with the lifting of restrictions, threatened a “toxic mixture”.

Ryan said this was a time for extreme caution, but added that each nation had to make its own decisions about what precautions to take against Covid-19 and the lifting of restrictions.

He spoke as the WHO announced the “tragic milestone” of four million recorded Covid-19 fatalities on Wednesday, adding that the pandemic’s true toll was probably higher. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced that the landmark had been reached, 18 months after the outbreak began in China in December 2019.

“The world is at a perilous point in this pandemic. We have just passed the tragic milestone of four million recorded Covid-19 deaths, which likely underestimates the overall toll,” Tedros told a press conference at WHO headquarters in Geneva.

Earlier this week Ryan cautioned against a “premature rush” back to normality. “For a lot of the world this thing is only getting started,” Ryan said. “I’m very pleased for countries that are getting this under control. But please spare a thought for those living without vaccines.”

“All of the countries of the Americas, we still have nearly one million cases a week. It isn’t over. The same in Europe – in the European region, we have half a million cases a week. It’s not like this thing has gone away.”

The issue of how, when and how quickly to end coronavirus restrictions around the world has become fraught amid resurgences linked to the more transmissible Delta variant and public weariness with lockdowns, mask-wearing and other sanitary measures.

Also commenting on the 19 July reopening plans, William Hanage, a professor of the evolution and epidemiology of infectious disease at Harvard, suggested that uncertainty remained over the outcome of ending of most restrictions in England.

“In some ways, the situation is quite simple,” he told the Guardian. “The cases are rocketing in a way that reflects the highly contagious nature of Delta. It is beginning to look like the major thing explaining its potency is that transmissibility, rather than immune evasion, leading to a lot of infection of and transmission between vaccinated individuals (although it certainly can happen, and reopening will offer the virus more opportunities).

“This is going to produce a few things – first it will be hospitalisations and deaths, but far fewer than at the worst stage of the winter. This is certainly good news, or maybe better than the worst-case scenario.

“On the other hand, with the reopening planned, there will be huge amounts of infection, and … a lot of people are going to feel pretty darned sick even if they don’t need a hospital bed. The long-term impacts are not known.”

Some countries that have loosened restrictions on issues such as mask-wearing, like Israel, have been forced to backtrack. The Netherlands, too, lifted most lockdown measures on 26 June as cases were falling, and around two-thirds of the population has received at least one vaccination shot.

However, with bars, restaurants, and nightclubs reopened, new cases in the country doubled to 8,000 in the week ending 6 July. On Wednesday health authorities reported 3,688 new cases for the previous 24-hour period. That has led the Dutch government on Wednesday to say it will consider whether it needs to take fresh action.

“I think the sharp rise in infection numbers are a reason to request urgent advice from the outbreak management team”, the health minister, Hugo de

Jonge, told reporters in The Hague.

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Covid surge pushes Indonesia's health system to the brink

Shortages of beds, oxygen and staff reported across island of Java as number of cases rise sharply

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Officers unload oxygen tanks at an emergency oxygen station set up at a building in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. Photograph: Adriana Adie/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Officers unload oxygen tanks at an emergency oxygen station set up at a building in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. Photograph: Adriana Adie/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

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[Gemma Holiani Cahya](#) in Jakarta

Wed 7 Jul 2021 20.14 EDT

Hospitals across the Indonesian island of Java are running out of oxygen, medicines, beds and even staff as a sharp rise in Covid cases pushes the country's health system to the brink.

Indonesia, which is facing one of the worst outbreaks in Asia, announced 34,379 new cases and 1,040 fatalities on Wednesday, both record highs.

Senior minister Luhut Pandjaitan said earlier this week he feared daily cases could reach as high as 70,000. The government said it was sourcing supplies of oxygen from Singapore to ease shortages.

“At worst, it [could reach] 60,000 to 70,000 cases per day, but I hope that doesn’t happen because our friends from police, military have done quite a good insulation,” Luhut said.

Hospitals across Java are already at a crisis point. Several have been forced to temporarily close their emergency rooms either because their oxygen stock is depleted, or because many of their staff have become ill, according to Indonesian media reports.

“It’s like a market outside the hospital … Even if you add 100 more beds it will not be enough. Patients are still going to flock to our hospital,” Syaiful Hidayat, the head of Covid-19 task force at Dr Slamet Martodirdjo regional hospital in Pamekasan, East Java, said on Tuesday.

Cases

The hospital is the largest in Pamekasan and is currently treating more than 100 Covid patients. The front yard has been converted into an emergency room, while the inside of the building is being used to isolate patients.

Although the hospital is fortunate that it can produce its own supply of liquid oxygen on site, additional oxygen tanks are still needed to support patients staying in tents.

The hospital is also facing staffing shortages after 10 of its doctors tested positive for Covid-19 this week. Emergency rooms that are usually taken care of by three doctors are now staffed by just one. On top of this, its supplies of remdesivir, the antiviral medicine, have run out.

“We usually use these injections for patients who are in critical condition,” said Syaiful, adding that they had been without the drug for 10 days.

Most people that have come to the hospital over the past two weeks arrived with very low oxygen saturation. “In these past two weeks 50 people died of Covid in this hospital. Most of them died before they had spent 24 hours being treated here,” he said.



A bed has been rolled out from an emergency tent erected to accommodate a surge of Covid-19 patients at a hospital in Bekasi, West Java. Photograph: Achmad Ibrahim/AP

Syaiful believed the actual death toll in the area was higher. Many patients were forced to return home after seeing how full the hospital was, or after unsuccessfully waiting in the tents.

“This is a critical condition; we can’t rely only on hospitals ... We have to make additional field hospitals with enough doctors and medicines for all patients,” he said.

Reports over the weekend suggested dozens of patients died after oxygen supplies ran out at Dr Sardjito general hospital, the largest hospital in Yogyakarta province. However, a statement by the hospital later said the patients had died due to their worsening condition, and that they were not denied oxygen.

At the Red Cross hospital in Bogor, West Java, Banon Sukandari, the director of medical and nursing services, said the facility was struggling to secure enough oxygen, diagnostic resources, medical workers, medicines and protective health gears.

The most sought-after items were N95 masks to protect staff, Banon said.

“We need to prioritise when it comes to using the protective health gears so we can sustain it longer,” she said, “we have to use what we have right now to serve the patients.”

According to the Indonesian Medical Association’s risk mitigation team , at least 405 doctors have died from Covid since the start of the pandemic.

The mental and emotional toll of the crisis on health workers is immeasurable. “It’s never easy to see so many people die in a day and prepare them for their burial. They are not strangers. They are our patients. It always breaks our hearts,” Banon said.

Lapor Covid, a volunteer group that aims to improve data collection during the pandemic, reported that since June at least 311 people have died in self-isolation while waiting for hospital beds. This is based only on cases they have tracked; the real number may be higher.

Senior minister Luhut Pandjaitan said the government planned to increase oxygen supplies and had identified accommodation that could be converted into isolation facilities if needed.

On Monday, the health ministry spokeswoman Siti Nadia Tarmizi told the Guardian that additional measures “would improve the [oxygen] condition over this week”.

Several companies – including Samator Group, Air Liquide, Air Products, Iwatani Industrial Gas and Linde – had agreed to supply oxygen to hospitals, she said.

Nadia said Indonesia produced 1,500,000 tonnes of oxygen a year, or 125,000 tonnes in a month. Normally, 70%, was used by industry, while 30% was used for medical purposes. “We have the capacity [to produce oxygen],” Nadia said. “We’ll push converting medical oxygen up to 50%.”

She urged hospitals not to turn away patients, telling them to use whatever space is available. “Patients whose saturation is less than 95% and who have trouble breathing must go to hospitals to get medical help,” she said. “This is an emergency situation so if there no bed, they can use chairs, but they must

be accepted at the health facility, because who will take care and observe them if they stay at home?"'

"This is not an easy situation. We are not fine," she added. Officials had hoped to control the outbreak through health protocols, she said.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Age, sex, vaccine dose, chronic illness – insight into risk factors for severe Covid is growing

A look at the demographics as 18.5 million people in the UK fall into the heightened risk category

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Roadway sign, June 2021, Buckinghamshire, urging vulnerable people to get vaccinated as the government began offering doses to younger age groups.
Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Roadway sign, June 2021, Buckinghamshire, urging vulnerable people to get vaccinated as the government began offering doses to younger age groups.
Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Amelia Hill](#)
[@byameliahill](#)

Wed 7 Jul 2021 14.08 EDT

About 18.5 million individuals, or 24.4% of the UK population, are at increased risk of developing severe Covid because of underlying health conditions. It is well known that older people are at high risk, but the understanding of all the risk factors is incomplete. Experts say that this knowledge needs to develop at speed to support policy and planning given that social restrictions will end in England on 19 July.

Vulnerable people with underlying health conditions

The conditions most likely to be mentioned on death certificates where Covid-19 is mentioned are diabetes (mentioned on 21% of death certificates where Covid was cited), hypertensive diseases, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and dementia. [Several studies](#) also report an increased risk of adverse outcomes in obese and morbidly obese people.

The British Heart Foundation said that experts had tested how vaccines worked in people with most health conditions, including heart conditions, and found the vaccines “just as effective”.

The foundation said: “The only possible exception is people who are taking immunosuppressants or who are immunocompromised. This is because they may not generate the same immune response to the vaccine. Research is being undertaken in the UK to better understand this. The vaccine is generally recommended for people who are immunocompromised or immunosuppressed.”

People who are not vaccinated or have had just a single dose

We know that the Delta coronavirus variant, which has spread across the UK, nearly doubles the risk of hospitalisation. [Public health experts](#) have found that people infected with the Delta variant were 85% more likely to be admitted to hospital than those infected with the Alpha variant.

With the elderly population better protected via vaccination, the majority of those in hospital are now younger than during previous Covid waves and have shorter stays.

But according to a [Public Health England](#) study published in May a single dose of either the AstraZeneca or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine reduces by 33% the risk of developing symptoms due to the Delta variant. After two doses the Pfizer vaccine was found to be 88% effective against symptomatic disease from the Delta variant.

Elderly people

[Almost 9 million of the 18.5 million at-risk individuals](#), based on current guidance across the UK, are aged over 69.

[That means that 66.2% of individuals over the age of 69 are at risk, rising to a peak of 79.4% among those aged 85–89 in England](#). This compares with a national “at-risk prevalence” of 24.4% of the UK population considered at moderate or high risk.

Among people already diagnosed with Covid, people who were 80 or older were 70 times more likely to die than those under 40.

Children

Of the national “at-risk prevalence” of 24.4%, children aged from two to nine make up 5.1%, and children across all school years make up 8.3%. “Kids can transmit the virus. They are susceptible to it,” said Anne Rimoin, an epidemiology professor at the University of California, Los Angeles.

[More than 640,000 children in England](#) were absent from school last week due to Covid-19. The number of schoolchildren with confirmed Covid infections rose from 15,000 on 24 June to 28,000 on 1 July, while the

number self-isolating because of a suspected Covid contact within school rose from 279,000 to 471,000 last week. Including contacts outside school, more than 560,000 children were self-isolating.

In Florida, the number of children who had [gone to hospital with Covid-19 surged by 23% in eight days](#) last summer. And a South Korean study showed that children as young as 10 [could transmit Covid within a household just as easily as adults](#).

Pregnant women

[The BMJ has published data](#) that found that the estimated incidence of admission to hospital with confirmed Covid infection in pregnancy was 4.9 per 1,000 maternities.

Underlying health conditions seem to increase the risk of developing severe Covid for pregnant women. [Among women who were pregnant on 5 March 2014](#) 12.9% were at risk due to underlying health conditions. In 2020, a third of the pregnant women admitted to hospital with Covid had an underlying health condition.

The study also found that 12 (5%) of 265 infants tested positive for Sars-CoV-2 RNA, six of them within the first 12 hours after birth.

Men

Men are more likely to suffer severe Covid, including hospitalisation and ICU admission, with [those aged over 50 tending to suffer the most acute symptoms of coronavirus](#).

The [risk of dying among those diagnosed with Covid](#) is also higher in males, with working-age males diagnosed with Covid twice as likely to die as females.

Women

A higher proportion of women are at risk of catching Covid but the association varies with age: research suggests that men are more likely than women to be at risk from the age of 55 upwards.

Sufferers of long Covid, however, are both relatively young and overwhelmingly female: women who get long Covid outnumber men by as much as four to one. Some experts suggest that the overall proportion of female long Covid patients could be even higher, potentially standing at 70-80%.

BAME

The risk of dying from Covid is higher in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups than in white ethnic groups

This is the opposite of what was seen in pre-Covid times, when the mortality rates were lower in Asian and Black ethnic groups than white ethnic groups.

After accounting for the effects of sex, age, deprivation and region, people of Bangladeshi ethnicity were found to have about twice the risk of death than people of white British ethnicity.

People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, other Asian, Caribbean and other black ethnicity had a higher risk of death, of between 10% and 50%, compared with white British individuals.

These analyses do not account for the effect of occupation, comorbidities or obesity.

The latest Oxford OpenSafely data show that vaccination rates in black communities are consistently 20 percentage points below the vaccination rates for the white community. For the 80+ age group vaccination coverage has been about 75% for black people and about 95% for white people.

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Movies

Interview

James Norton: ‘I try to present myself as friendly and people see something darker’

[Zoe Williams](#)



James Norton: ‘My headspace is a 1950s priest.’ Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

James Norton: ‘My headspace is a 1950s priest.’ Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

After playing psychopaths and priests, the actor is starring in an almost unbearably tragic role. He discusses bullies, broodiness and blockbusters



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

James Norton's latest film, *Nowhere Special*, has a premise so tragic it should be completely unfilmable. He plays John, a 35-year-old single father who is given a few months to live, and has to find a new family for his three-year-old son. Even before you factor in the incredible performance by Daniel Lamont, who was only four when the film was shot, it sounds too obviously a tear-jerker, especially from Uberto Pasolini, a [director known for *Still Life*](#), a very finely drawn, understated film in 2013, which comes at death from a much more oblique angle.

In fact, the film slips deftly past any obvious poignance to create something much more complicated, with arresting performances from Norton and his tiny co-star. “Credit must be given to the director,” Norton insists, on Zoom from his home in London. “He said: ‘I don’t want this to be brutally sad, I want this to be about life as much as it is about death.’” This you might characterise as a standard actorly response, generous and modest. Then there’s more: “My taste is aligned to that kind of performance. But the subject is so charged and universal, you feel the responsibility sometimes as an actor to show that you recognise how operatic and sad this is. Every time, I would give him a performance that was big, and schmaltzy and gooey, and

he was like: ‘Yeah, I know you really liked that, but I’m not going to use it.’”

Norton has this searching, slightly self-flagellating approach – what he has said boils down to: “I nearly ruined this movie by trying to prove to the audience how empathetic I am, but luckily the director stopped me.” It’s the most Catholic thing I’ve ever heard. Norton has an idiosyncratic religious hinterland, educated by Benedictines, then taking a degree in theology before going to Rada. But more on God and monks later.



With Daniel Lamont in *Nowhere Special*.

He comes off as a series of subtle contradictions; he’s very comfortable in his skin, yet he hates talking about himself. He’s like a masterclass in courtesy, but he’s not a pleaser. His signature roles – the monstrous Tommy Royce in [Happy Valley](#), the tortured Sidney Chambers in Grantchester, a languid Duncan Grant in Life in Squares – indicate a deft approach to an acting career, side-stepping pigeonholes, always extending his range. But if someone were to write a comic part directly for him, it would be a character who hates the trivial but loves the carnival, who hates small talk yet loves being at a party. Imagine the chaos that person would cause.

Born in 1985 in south London, his mother a teacher, his father a lecturer, Norton moved with his family to North Yorkshire as a child, and went to Ampleforth, a Benedictine boarding school you could describe as “renowned” or “notorious”, depending on your mood. (In a depressingly familiar story about prestigious boarding schools, Ampleforth was [banned from taking new pupils](#) in November 2020, after an [inquiry that found decades of child sexual abuse](#); the ban was [lifted in April](#).)

Norton speaks of his intense connection with the landscape around the school (the village of Ampleforth is on the edge of the North York Moors). “There were elements of the setting that were very powerful. It’s such a beautiful part of the world, and three times a day, we would sit, and contemplate, and pray. I was grateful for that. It wasn’t therapy, but it was a moment of pause and meditation, in this incredibly lush valley.” He pauses, then reaches for more evidence, as if I might not believe that the valley was lush. “People go on holiday there!”

Really, if I had any scepticism, it wasn’t about Yorkshire, it was because it often feels like there’s something he’s not saying. “What do you think I’m hiding – my dark obsession with some cult of Catholicism?” he asks, winningly. Not exactly. But particularly when he talks about his religious phase – “I was very religious as a teenager, which coincided with a hard time at school” – there’s often a shadow of quite a brutal atmosphere, but you can’t quite put your finger on it.

That burst of faith led to his studying theology at Cambridge, even though he had lost it (or, as he puts it, “sort of changed”) by the time he was 18. “Lost faith” is too strong a term – but “still pretty spiritual” is too vague. “There are moments when I’m at my most extreme, with pain or trauma or joy – then maybe you’re crying out for any guidance or wisdom,” he says.

Going back to that “hard time”, he often talks about bullying, but in the most glancing way. Last year, when there were rumours that he might be the next James Bond, he said: “I do have moments when I’m being shot by a great photographer, wearing great clothes, when the little unattractive bullied kid in me is laughing his fucking head off!” In our conversation, it happens when we talk about the difference between a bad review from a reviewer, and a bad response from the audience on Rotten Tomatoes. I tell him I’m

surprised that actors ever look at Rotten Tomatoes. “To be honest, I don’t. I did a couple of times, and I know that one or two of my movies have got like 4%. We have this weird, sick fascination with reviews, but to combine that and the audience into one metric, it’s like getting every bully that’s ever existed in your life, putting them all in one room and then throwing you into it naked.” Thinking about the one through-line connecting very different performances, Norton is incredibly – maybe uniquely – good at suggesting buried pain with the tiniest flicker of his features, which maybe he learned through the Lord of the Flies re-enactment that is the English public school system. “I would never send my kids to that,” is how he concludes this elliptical exchange.



With Lourdes Faberes in *Grantchester*. Photograph: Des Willie/ITV

His breakthrough roles on stage – [Posh, at the Royal Court](#), and a [zinging revivification of Journey's End in 2011](#) – were cast to the type that he describes: “I was a Londoner from a well-to-do family with floppy hair.” A kind of Hugh Grant reboot, you might say, except “I’m not as bumbling as Hugh Grant,” he objects, then corrects himself, fast. “He has this great comic sensibility.” Having recently set up a production company, Rabbit Track Pictures, with the producer Kitty Kaletsky, he’s very understanding about the urge to always keep actors in the same kinds of roles. “I get it – I get why it makes everyone’s life easier. If you’re thinking about the whole

canvas, not one actor going through a transformative experience, pigeonholes make the money safer.”

It’s an interesting swerve, from performing to producing (though he has by no means given up acting); quite rare to go from the creative side to the money side, especially when you’re so successful at the first. But it’s part of a longer play, “to take the helm and direct my own stuff. As actors you don’t have that many goes at it. People pay attention when you direct and you have to get it right.”

Norton veered away from his acting pigeonhole quite dramatically playing Tommy Royce in *Happy Valley*, a powerful crime drama from Sally Wainwright at the top of her game. Broadly speaking (no spoilers), he plays the incarnation of pure evil. Talking about his process, once, to the New York Times, he said he tried to inhabit each character in his daily life, which was a trial when he was doing *Happy Valley*, having to wash up in a broodingly psychopathic way. “I never said that! I can’t believe I said that.” “You definitely said it,” I insist. “It’s the New York Times. They have this whole accuracy thing.”

“I’m not one of those actors who turns up on set in character,” he says. “I do my work, I do my research. I’m all for commitment. If it helps you to be completely consumed for days on end, great. When other people aren’t able to do their work because your process is so extreme, that’s selfish. I’m not that kind of actor at all.”

He seems plagued by the idea that he might once, quite a long time ago, in passing, have sounded like a wanker. “You just can’t take yourself too seriously. This industry is full of overly earnest people who think we’re God’s gift to mankind. We’re entertainers, we’re storytellers, there’s a lot of play and childishness in that.” A pause. “I’m sure I didn’t say that.” Maybe, I suggest, you were just trying to be polite. “I was probably just trying to keep my teachers at drama school happy.” This has a cacophonous ring of truth; he comes over as a person who puts a huge amount of thought into keeping people happy.

On the subject of sheer entertainment, Norton has also recently starred in *The Nevers*, a show I absolutely loved that had a rocky beginning after its

creator, Joss Whedon, was accused of creating “toxic environments” in his past work (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and, later, *Justice League*). What should have been the first season was turned into two mini-seasons – the second, expected to air in 2022, will have a new showrunner, Philippa Goslett – and the reception has been quite muted. “I’d never seen a show like it,” Norton says. “Female-driven, these warriors in Victorian London, so indefinable and genre-bending. My experience of Joss was all great. I know that I can speak for the cast that we had a great time. I don’t know what happened in the past, and you have to listen to those people’s voices. All I know is that we loved working with him and it was a shame to see him go, but Philippa will pick it up beautifully.”



With Daniel Lamont and Uberto Pasolini at the Venice film festival in 2020.
Photograph: Marechal Aurore/ABACA/PA Images

“Starred” is a moot point, by the way – *The Nevers* is the ultimate ensemble drama; everyone in it gives a transfixing performance and there are about 100 of them. Norton plays Hugo Swann, a dissolute young aristo possessed of a Wildean wit who runs orgies and – this somehow feels more transgressive – drinks in the morning. Norton groups a collection of his roles loosely as “the nice guy who’s quietly sociopathic underneath ... I don’t know why they see that in me,” he says wryly. “I try to present myself as friendly and they see something darker.”

The role that seems, from the outside, most like him was Sidney Chambers, [the crime-cracking, heavy-drinking cleric in Grantchester](#), and he agrees: “My headspace is a 1950s priest. That was also my first role out of the gate as far as carrying a show and the responsibilities that involves.” Part of what was interesting about that show was not just Norton’s performance – which is really humane – but also Robson Green’s, which is idiosyncratic, understated, relaxed. They obviously had a rare chemistry.

Nothing compares to acting with a four-year-old, however. Norton says of Nowhere Special: “It was one of the most special experiences I’ve ever had on a film set. The classic thing is you avoid animals and children. Not only is Daniel the lead, there are loads of other kids in it and loads of animals. There was always some rabbit, or a dog.”

It really is a move of breathtaking ambition to try to do anything sensible involving a four-year-old, but Norton makes it sound like a cakewalk. “When you’re doing improv with a fellow actor, you’re constantly aware of this sabotaging voice.” He means, I suppose, the sabotaging voice of self-awareness. “With Daniel there was no voice; he was going through the process of understanding death in real time.” To underline the point, he recalls that at the end of the shoot, Lamont asked his mum when they were going to start filming; he thought they had been rehearsing the whole time. “Most of the preparation was going to his house, having dinner, playing with his toys. Had Daniel not responded to the filming, it would have been a disaster. But it was amazing. I really did have a very genuine affectionate relationship with that boy. We really did get on. He just gave himself to me as a friend.”

Did it make him want children? “Oh yes. I was going back to my girlfriend [the actor Imogen Poots], saying this has definitely kicked me into dad mode. You know, I’m mid-30s, I’ve always wanted a family, my sister has kids, my broody barometer is kicking off anyway.” He laughs. “I suppose that’s your headline?”

With the tragedy of a global pandemic still so fresh, this might be a dicey time to launch a film that is itself so tragic, and that fact hasn’t escaped Norton. “It’s interesting to work out what appetite people have right now – whether blockbusters or arthouse movies are going to dominate the cinema.

Is it going to be a summer of love and escapism? Or are we a bit quieter and more reflective, because we've had to be?" It feels like a question about something larger than film, quite an idealised dichotomy from an anguished idealist.

Nowhere Special is in UK cinemas from 16 July

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Architecture

‘A great city has been defaced’: why has a poo emoji arrived on Edinburgh’s skyline?



‘Like an unfortunate deposit from on high’ ... the W Hotel muscles into the famous view from Calton Hill. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

‘Like an unfortunate deposit from on high’ ... the W Hotel muscles into the famous view from Calton Hill. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

With its spires, castle and monuments, the Scottish capital’s glorious panorama is world famous. Now a looming new addition has appeared – and is causing outrage



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

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Thu 8 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

You can't polish a turd, but you can clad it in bronze-coloured steel. Edinburgh's new W Hotel is proof. Poking its faecal peak above the historic skyline, puncturing the globally cherished panorama of elegant stone steeples and spires, this shimmering pile is evidence that, despite all the Unesco World Heritage site protections, conservation group campaigns and lengthy planning negotiations, shit still happens.

Trumpeting the arrival of [the £1bn St James Quarter](#) retail-hotel-housing behemoth to the Georgian New Town, the bronzed coil [now butts on to the horizon from practically every prospect of the Scottish capital](#). From some angles, it appears to squat on other buildings' shoulders, like an unfortunate deposit dropped from on high. From others, it looms up in the background, standing as a menacing dung heap at the end of axial vistas (perhaps appropriately in the case of the [Melville monument](#), providing a soiled backdrop to a [man who delayed the abolition of slavery](#)). Just when you thought you'd evaded the gilded mess, its pert tip rears up above the rooftops with a mocking flick.

The building's architects, London firm [Jestico + Whiles](#), had other references in mind. Their planning application included images of an haute couture blindfold by Valentino, its silken ribbons billowing above a model's head. There were also pictures of big rolls of paper in the printing presses that used to populate this part of town, to tick the "local context" box. The form of the Edinburgh-born [Walnut Whip chocolate snack](#) has been mentioned, too, along with a spiral of orange peel, and even an iced cupcake – anything to distract the scatological mind.



A brutal assault on the street ... The W Hotel in St James Quarter at ground level. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

"It's a happy building," says its architect, James Dilley. "It's about celebrating Edinburgh's position as the pre-eminent festival capital. There are some parts of the city that are more serious and introverted, but this is the opposite. It's communicative, it's expressive and it's supposed to make people happy."

A campaign was launched to complete the picture and put 'googly eyes oan the jobby'

The hotel has certainly aroused mirth. When the likeness to the poop emoji became apparent, a campaign was launched to complete the picture: "[Pit](#)

[Googly Eyes Oan The Jobby” demands an almost 1,000-strong petition.](#) Meanwhile, [the Golden Turd Hotel Twitter](#) account amasses photos of the structure posted by its followers, rejoicing in its having topped a poll last year for [the worst building in the world](#). As accidental marketing strategies go, it might be a stroke of genius, given the millennial target audience of the “design-led” hotel chain. There will certainly be nothing like celebrating Hogmanay at the summit of the massive jobby, with 360-degree views of the city and the North Sea beyond. Although beware of peeping toms loitering beneath the glass dance floor on the roof, “based on the concept of what’s up the Scotsman’s kilt”, says Martin Perry, development director at Nuveen Real Estate.



The poo emoji. Photograph: Publicity image

The hotel is still under construction and is due to open next year, but the surrounding St James shopping mall opened last week, allowing visitors a closer look at the great coiled midden. From afar, it may be a crime against the skyline – but up close, it’s a brutal assault on the street.

Facing the dilemma of how to terminate the spiralling “ribbon” at ground level, the architects settled on the curious solution of making it appear to erupt from the street. A rupture in the granite paving is surrounded by little sculpted waves, as if the ground had been ripped open by the force of

subterranean bowel movements. Just a few days after opening, it had already been roped off, [the clumsily fitted steel cladding panels patched up with gaffer tape](#) (the developer insists they will be replaced). A sturdy turd this is not.



‘Golden turd’ ... the hotel was voted worst building in the world.
Photograph: Ian Georgeson/Alamy

The hotel is just the gilded tip of a 158,000sq metre (1.7m sq ft) iceberg of shops, restaurants, a cinema and luxury flats that rise above a 1,600-space underground car park, forming an entirely new chunk of the city centre. It replaces a maligned 1970s megastructure that had always been seen as a blot on the New Town. The former St James Centre contained a shopping arcade and car park beneath the office blocks of [New St Andrew’s House](#), left vacant since the 1990s when the Scottish government moved out owing to asbestos contamination. Perry says they looked at options for reusing the buildings, but their panellised structure made it impossible – and the council was eager to see the wrecking ball swing.

It has been a long time coming. In 2006 the site was bought by Henderson Global Investors, which was in turn acquired by TIAA, an American pension fund that manages \$1.3tn (£943bn) in global assets, [that reportedly include interests in handgun manufacturing](#), and [others that contribute to](#)

[Brazil's deforestation](#). Rebranded as Nuveen Real Estate in 2019, the developer had form in controversial regeneration schemes: [Henderson planned to destroy Smithfield Market](#) in the City of London, until their plans were quashed by the secretary of state in 2014. Blocked in London, they channelled their energies further north, where, with the mighty backing of TIAA, they were welcomed with open arms.

The brutalist bulk of the previous structure gave the developer ammunition to argue that anything it proposed was an improvement – which, at ground level, it mostly is. Designed by [Edinburgh architect Alan Murray](#), with the large commercial architecture firm BDP, the masterplan makes sense of the complex topography, stitching into the surrounding streets at three different levels. It connects the two historic parallel high streets of George Street and Princes Street at their eastern ends with a crescent-shaped multi-storey “galleria” shopping arcade, and creates an additional east-west connection across the site, open 24 hours. However, [dramatic flooding during storms over the weekend](#) suggests it might not be built to withstand the Scottish elements.

Keen to create a truly “mixed-use” development, the team embarked on a global safari to see other examples of privatised retail-led fiefdoms, including Roppongi Hills in Tokyo and Canal City in Fukuoka. Both are the work of [Jon Jerde](#), the US godfather of the themed mall, who paved the way for this suburban building type to be reimposed back on to the very city centres it was trying to emulate, creating a weird feedback loop of fake street-like streets and patrolled piazzas. It has since become the ubiquitous model of 21st-century urbanism, as city centres across the world are relentlessly mallified.



Killing the high street? The new mall has seen long queues of shoppers.
Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

In Edinburgh, the development takes the form of 152 apartments, a five-screen Everyman cinema and an aparthotel perched on top of the mall, with forthcoming roof terraces and ground level piazzas set to be “activated” by festival events. It is hoped that the gargantuan car park will have alternative uses, too. It features a DJ booth and movable soundproof partitions that can be wheeled out to enclose a nightclub for the hotel, while the floors have been designed to be easily converted in future, into a supermarket for example.

The architecture itself eschews the Jerde fireworks, instead creating a generic vanilla backdrop for the shop fit-outs, while the outer walls have been wrapped in a thin skin of limestone in an attempt to blend them into the neighbouring streets. The only problem is that the surrounding Unesco-listed townscape is built of buff sandstone.

“If we had used sandstone,” says Perry, “we would have exhausted all of the available sandstone in UK quarries for the next three years.” Cheaper Jura limestone was chosen instead, which conservationists fear could take on a blotchy patina in a few years’ time, as has happened with a building on Castle Street nearby. The architects insist this won’t happen.



No escape ... the hotel and the Melville Monument. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

Beyond the aesthetics, there are questions about the impact of this vast retail vortex on the rest of the city. The mall's opening few days have been phenomenally busy, with endless queues for new arrivals, such as the Lego store and the fashion chain & Other Stories. By contrast, Edinburgh's famed shopping promenade of Princes Street is now a sad sight, dotted with the empty shells of Covid-slain department stores and vacant shopfronts with signs directing passersby to new locations in the St James Quarter. Have the interests of an American teachers' pension fund not only defiled Edinburgh's skyline, but hammered the final nail into the coffin of its high streets?

There is also questionable wisdom in welcoming a 250-room hotel and 75-room aparthotel to a city that already has a glut of such accommodation, with more than 6,300 more hotel rooms in the pipeline, according to a 2019 council report. And the project's contribution to the city's housing need? While the "[curated living experience](#)" of [New Eidyn](#), on the top level of the development, ranges from £320,000 studios to £2.26m penthouses, you'll have to head a mile north to find [the 41 affordable homes, delivered off-site in the cheaper Canonmills area](#).

Beyond all this, the development has benefited from £61.4m of public

money in the form of Growth Accelerator model funding from the Scottish government, via the city council, for public realm and road junction upgrades. Like the controversial US system of [tax increment financing](#), the idea is that the initial public outlay will be repaid by increased revenues from business rates. Advocates argue the model stimulates investment in rundown areas, while critics say it is an opaque developer giveaway without much public benefit. In Edinburgh, it seems odd that a huge retail and leisure development in the city centre, projected to receive 25 million visitors a year, should be deemed to require such lavish public subsidy – particularly when it's spent on encouraging more people to drive into town.

[Why are our cities built for 6ft-tall men? The female architects who fought back](#)

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The chortling turd will have the last laugh. Having made its way on to the skyline, against the advice of council planning officers and heritage groups ([voted through by seven to five at committee, along party lines](#)), it has become the self-appointed arbiter of the city.



Generic ... the outer walls have been wrapped in a skin of limestone and reconstituted stone, but the surrounding Unesco-listed townscape is built of sandstone. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

When the council granted permission in 2019 for the Dunard Centre, a drum-shaped concert hall by Sir David Chipperfield on a site to the west of the hotel, [Nuveen successfully raised a legal challenge](#) and forced the project back to the drawing board to downsize. Its justification? The building would have a damaging impact on the Unesco World Heritage-listed skyline. The developer also [vetoed a promising proposal for new film studios on the outskirts of the city](#), on the grounds that it might include a retail element in future.

“It seems that an American pension fund is Edinburgh’s new planning authority,” says author and critic David Black, who has campaigned against inappropriate development in the capital for years. “Democratic process has been supplanted by fiduciary duty to shareholders, seeking the maximisation of profits to the exclusion of everything else. A great city has been defaced, for what?”

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A statue of Saddam Hussein being pulled down in Baghdad's Firdos Square in April 2003. Photograph: Jerome Delay/AP

[The long read](#)

The toppling of Saddam's statue: how the US military made a myth

A statue of Saddam Hussein being pulled down in Baghdad's Firdos Square in April 2003. Photograph: Jerome Delay/AP

In 2003, the destruction of one particular statue in Baghdad made worldwide headlines and came to be a symbol of western victory in Iraq. But there was so much more to it – or rather, so much less

by [Alex von Tunzelmann](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

The abiding image of the Iraq war in 2003 was the toppling of a statue of the country's dictator, [Saddam Hussein](#). It was an image relayed across the world as a symbol of victory for the American-led coalition, and liberation for the Iraqi people. But was that the truth? Putting up a statue is an attempt to create a story about history. During the invasion of Iraq, the *pulling down* of a statue was also an attempt to create a story about history. The story of Saddam's statue shows both the possibilities, and the limits, of making a myth.

Operation Iraqi Freedom, as it was called by those running it, began on 20 March 2003. It was led by the US at the head of a “coalition of the willing”, including troops from Australia, Poland and the UK. President George W Bush claimed that the aims of the operation were clear: “to disarm [Iraq](#) of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein’s support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people”. He continued: “The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder … It is a fight for the security of our nation and the peace of the world, and we will accept no outcome but victory.” This justification for war was hotly disputed at the time, and has been ever since.

Invading troops moved quickly through the country. They arrived at Baghdad on 7 April, two and a half weeks into the ground campaign. It was there that the statue of Saddam stood in Firdos Square (*firdos* meaning paradise), right in the centre of the city. Two days later, it would come crashing down.

In 2020, statues across the world were pulled down in an extraordinary wave of iconoclasm. There had been such waves before – during the English Reformation, the French Revolution, the fall of the Soviet Union and so on – but the 2020 iconoclasm was global. Across former imperial powers and their former colonial possessions, from the US and the UK to Canada, South Africa, the Caribbean, India, Bangladesh and New Zealand, Black Lives Matter protesters defaced and hauled down statues of slaveholders, Confederates and imperialists.

Edward Colston [was hurled](#) into the harbour in Bristol, England. Robert E Lee was covered in [graffiti](#) in Richmond, Virginia. Christopher Columbus was toppled in Minnesota, beheaded in Massachusetts, and thrown into a lake in Virginia. King Leopold II of the Belgians was set on fire in Antwerp and doused in red paint in Ghent. Winston Churchill was [daubed](#) with the words “is a racist” in London.

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Some feared that this was becoming a frenzy. In the US, Confederate statues had long been a focus for public protest, but soon statues of national icons and progressive figures were attacked too. Protesters in Madison, Wisconsin, tore down the Forward statue, celebrating women’s rights, and one of an abolitionist. A statue of the abolitionist Frederick Douglass in Rochester, New York, was knocked [clean off](#) its base. It was unclear whether the perpetrators were confused antifascists or fascists, retaliating for the removal of Confederates and slaveholders.

The backlash was led by President Donald Trump, who signed an executive order declaring: “Many of the rioters, arsonists, and left-wing extremists who have carried out and supported these acts have explicitly identified themselves with ideologies – such as Marxism – that call for the destruction of the United States system of government.” The order reiterated that those who damage federal property could face 10 years in jail.

Boris Johnson, the British prime minister, said [on Twitter](#) that “those statues teach us about our past, with all its faults. To tear them down would be to lie about our history, and impoverish the education of generations to come.” The Conservative government announced that it would amend the Criminal

Damage Act so anyone damaging a war memorial in Britain could also be looking at 10 years in prison.

Museums and civic authorities were quick to react, too, though often in a different way. The day after the slave trader Colston's statue was pulled down, the Museum of London Docklands removed its own statue of another slave trader, Robert Milligan.

In the US and UK, rightwing Republican and Conservative administrations took the opportunity to position themselves as the champions of American and British civilisation: the last defence against barbarism and "[political correctness](#)". In September 2020, the British culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, [wrote to museums](#), threatening them with funding cuts if they took any actions "motivated by activism or politics".

On the face of it, the attacks on statues in 2020 followed a pattern: those who cheered on the protesters pulling them down tended to be younger and more socially liberal, while those who were dismayed by the destruction tended to be older and more conservative.

If you look more deeply into it, though, the issue of statues is far more complicated. When statues of Lenin were pulled down [across Ukraine](#) in 2014, and when the Firdos Square statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled down in Iraq in 2003, many older western conservatives rejoiced; some younger progressives were less sure about celebrating. When the Islamic State [destroyed](#) ancient statues in Palmyra in 2015, there was condemnation across the political spectrum. Many of those responding to these events were the same people who responded very differently later when statues of Confederates and slaveholders were the focus. Statues are not neutral, and do not exist in vacuums. Our reactions to them depend on who they commemorate, who put them up, who defends them, who pulls them down, and why.

Saddam Hussein joined the Ba'ath party at the age of 20 and, in the next two decades, rose through the party, seizing power in 1979. His ambition was great: to assert leadership of the Arab world and control the Persian Gulf. He invaded Iran's oilfields in 1980, leading to a long, expensive and destructive

war. He invaded Kuwait in 1990, earning the condemnation of the United Nations.

In January 1991, there was a military response from an international coalition led by the US, including Egypt, France, Saudi Arabia and the UK. In what became known as the first Gulf war, Saddam was forced out of Kuwait. Internationally, Iraq was humiliated. Northern and southern sections of the country were declared “no-fly zones” where the air traffic was policed by American, British and French forces. The country was slapped with ruinous sanctions and was banned from developing nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Internally, it was stricken with rebellions, notably by Shia and Kurdish groups. Saddam put these down brutally.

As president, Saddam had modelled himself partially on Joseph Stalin. Both were peasant outsiders who, with exceptional ruthlessness, had made their way to the top. Saddam imitated Stalin’s style of propaganda, promoting images of himself smiling and enriching the Iraqi people: a benevolent uncle. He even grew a similar moustache. Like Stalin, he also raised vast numbers of statues to himself.

Many Islamic traditions ban the representation of human figures, particularly religious figures. In terms of Iraqi history, though, Islam is a relatively recent arrival. Mesopotamia, as the region was once known, has ancient and glorious traditions of art, including statuary, stretching back thousands of years. Representations of figures are deeply embedded in Mesopotamian culture: there could be no ban on them. Under Saddam’s rule, it was possible – even necessary – to make images of him. All schools, public buildings and businesses had to display his portrait.

Saddam’s iconography was a distinctive blend of military swagger and historical references. Some of his equestrian statues depicted him with sword drawn, pointed in the direction of Jerusalem: his rearing horse was flanked by rockets. He was occasionally sculpted wearing the Dome of the Rock on his head, the Islamic shrine refashioned as a helmet. His images used costume and props to link him to Hammurabi, the Babylonian lawgiver; Nebuchadnezzar, enslaver of the Jewish people; various caliphs; Saladin, the defeater of Christian crusaders (who, like Saddam, had been born in Tikrit); and even Muhammad himself. The essence of all these

historical figures was supposedly distilled down into Saddam, uniting the Iraqi people and Mesopotamian history, reaching out across the whole Middle East.



Statues of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in 2005. Photograph: David Furst/AFP/Getty Images

After the Gulf war in 1991, sanctions imposed by the international community banned all trade with Iraq except in humanitarian circumstances. Among many hardships, this made it difficult for artists and sculptors to access materials. One way to get paint, canvas, bronze and stone was to paint pictures or make sculptures of Saddam. If the art was right, the regime would provide. While the Iraqi people suffered under sanctions, Saddam built vast palaces filled with monuments to himself. It is unclear how many statues of himself Saddam put up in this period, though there were hundreds in Baghdad alone.

There was nothing special about the statue of Saddam that was put up in Firdos Square in April 2002 to mark his 65th birthday. Firdos Square is not the most important location in Baghdad, and the statue was unexceptional: a bronze standing figure, 12 metres high, weighing around a tonne. The fact that it was not a big deal may be one reason why, since its destruction, there has been confusion as to who made it.

At least two different sculptors have been credited with creating this statue, with two different narratives. This is characteristic of the story of Saddam's statue in Firdos Square. The boundary between what is real and what is fake would soon disappear altogether.

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard defined hyperreality as a state in which you cannot tell the difference between reality and a simulation of reality. In 1991, at the time of the first Gulf war, he wrote three essays touching on this theme, later published together as *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Baudrillard argued that the relevant events in the first couple of months of 1991 were not really a war, in the sense that “war” was commonly understood: they were a *simulation* of a war.

There were two reasons for this. First, the events were carefully choreographed through the media: the coalition military controlled which images could be shown, and which journalists were allowed to report. The television-watching public audience in the west was shown non-stop video footage of firework-like bombings, and point-of-view shots of missiles heading to their targets.

The effect was that of playing a computer game: clean, surgical, without consequences. Second, Baudrillard argued, the outcome of the war was never really in doubt: it was “won in advance”. The coalition was always going to win, and Saddam, for all his posturing, was in no position to fight back. This simulated war was “stripped of its passions, its phantasms, its finery, its veils, its violence, its images: war stripped bare by its technicians even, and then reclothed by them with all the artifices of electronics, as though with a second skin”.

The hyperreality of the Gulf war that Baudrillard described caught the imaginations of writers, artists and film-makers. It looked ever more prescient as the internet began to connect the world. Excitement and anxieties about real versus virtual experiences grew. A hyperreal war was played out in the 1997 political comedy film *Wag the Dog* (loosely based on a 1993 novel), in which an American president creates a fictional war abroad to distract from a sex scandal at home. Hyperreality was the basis of the

1999 action science-fiction blockbuster The Matrix. The character Morpheus is quoting Baudrillard when he says: “Welcome to the desert of the real.”



Iraqi information minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf during the early days of the Iraq war in April 2003. Photograph: PA/BBC

In 2003, when US-led forces launched Operation Iraqi Freedom and invaded Iraq, the situation would be different. This war would be fought both in “the desert of the real” and in the real desert. A ground invasion was the focus. Resistance was put up by Iraqi forces, and territory was occupied by the coalition, though this war, too, was effectively “won in advance”.

Iraqi spokesman Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf’s lively press briefings claimed that Saddam was winning, but it was pretty easy to tell that his attempt to create a simulation of victory was not reality. “Baghdad is safe. The battle is still going on. Their infidels are committing suicide by the hundreds on the gates of Baghdad. Don’t believe those liars,” he told international camera crews on the roof of the Palestine Hotel. Behind him, viewers could see Iraqi troops fleeing from American tanks on the other side of the river. Al-Sahaf became something of a celebrity, nicknamed Comical Ali (a play on Chemical Ali, Saddam’s intelligence chief Ali Hassan al-Majid, who had ordered the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds in the 1980s).

Bringing down Saddam's statue was a greater feat of hyperreality. It would be presented to the world as a climax: the triumph of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The coalition forces were cast as liberators, allowing the Iraqi people to rise up at last and tear down the most powerful symbol of the dictator who had oppressed them. But the reality was not so simple.

Since they had invaded Iraq on 20 March, coalition forces had been pulling down dozens of statues of Saddam. For example, on 29 March, British forces had blown up a cast-iron statue of him in Basra. "The purpose of that is psychological," said a military spokesperson, "to show the people ... he does not wield influence, and we will strike at any representative token of that eroding influence". But no one filmed this event, so – while it was reported by the BBC and other news organisations – it made little impact outside Basra itself.

On 7 April, the day that the fall of Baghdad began, US soldiers seized the Republican Palace. Their commander ordered his troops to find a statue that could be destroyed, and to wait until Fox News arrived before they began to destroy it. Soon enough, they found an equestrian statue of Saddam. The television crew turned up, and the soldiers duly fired a shell. The footage was not exciting – just Americans destroying stuff, no crowd of grateful Iraqis – so it did not get much play. That same day, US Marines and Iraqi civilians brought down another Saddam statue in Karbala. The next day, British troops took out another one in Basra. There were so many statues of Saddam in Iraq that they were being felled on a daily basis.



A statue of Saddam Hussein being destroyed by US forces in Tikrit in July 2003. Photograph: HO/REUTERS

A number of international journalists who were covering the invasion moved into the Palestine Hotel on Firdos Square, where Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf held his amusing press conferences. They had been relocated from the Al Rasheed Hotel, closer to the city's political centre, after much of it had been destroyed by bombing. Though the Palestine Hotel was known to be a media refuge, an American tank [fired a shell](#) at it on 8 April, mistaking a camera on a balcony for an Iraqi spotting device. Two journalists were killed, three were injured, and the rest were outraged.

It was fortunate, then, that a story would come along to distract them from their anger at the Pentagon the next day, and that it would happen on Firdos Square – right outside their hotel. Fortunate, but not planned by the Pentagon. The story was created spontaneously by American soldiers on the ground. It was spun into a full-blown global event by the international news media.

On 9 April 2003, Lt Col Brian McCoy, in charge of the 3rd Battalion 4th Marines, was told by a journalist at the Palestine Hotel that there were no Iraqi forces in Firdos Square. Simon Robinson, a reporter for Time

magazine, said McCoy knew that journalists would be there, so “there were going to be opportunities”.

Capt Bryan Lewis, leader of McCoy’s tank company, blocked the streets leading to the square. Gunnery Sgt Leon Lambert, in an M-88 armoured recovery vehicle, radioed him with an idea: should they pull down Saddam’s statue? Lewis replied: “No way.”

McCoy went into the Palestine Hotel to meet reporters. Just after 5pm, Lambert radioed Lewis again, telling him that now local Iraqis themselves wanted to pull down the statue. There were a few of them in the square, and a lot of journalists.



Journalists in the garden of Palestine Hotel in Baghdad on 30 March 2003, with a view of the soon-to-be-toppled statue. Photograph: Ahmad Al-Rubaye/EPA

Lambert’s claim that some Iraqis wanted to pull down the statue is corroborated to some extent by Kadhim Sharif Hassan al-Jabouri, a local mechanic. Kadhim claimed that he had once fixed motorcycles for Saddam and his son Uday, but there had been a dispute over money. Uday had him thrown in prison. “Fourteen or 15 people in my own family were executed by Saddam,” Kadhim told the BBC. When he heard American forces were

coming, he was happy. He says he took his sledgehammer and left his nearby garage to go to Firdos Square.

Lambert asked Lewis: “If a sledgehammer and rope fell off the 88, would you mind?”

“I wouldn’t mind,” Lewis replied. “But don’t use the 88.”

Lambert says he gave the Iraqis his sledgehammer, though Kadhim claims to have brought his own. It is unclear, then, whether the idea to attack the statue came from a relatively low-ranking US soldier, from an Iraqi civilian, or from both.

Kadhim began to hammer at the statue, but all he could really do was get a couple of plaques off the base. Lambert’s rope was thrown around the statue’s neck. There was little chance of this small crowd toppling such a large bronze. An hour went by.

Saddam was not budging. “We watched them with the rope, and I knew that was never going to happen,” Lambert told journalist Peter Maass, who wrote a [detailed investigation](#) of the felling of the statue in 2011. “They were never going to get it down.”

At this point, the handful of Iraqis having a go at the statue seemed inclined to give up and go home. Just then, McCoy came out of the hotel. “I realised this was a big deal,” he said. “You’ve got all the press out there and everybody is liquored up on the moment. You have this Paris 1944 feel. I remember thinking, the media is watching the Iraqis trying to topple this icon of Saddam Hussein. Let’s give them a hand.”



The toppled Saddam statue in Fardous Square, Baghdad on 10 April 2003.
Photograph: Patrick Baz/EPA

McCoy radioed a senior officer, who authorised him to involve troops directly in pulling down the statue. McCoy told his troops they could use the M-88 recovery vehicle after all, providing there were no fatalities.

Around 6.50pm the M-88 drove away from the statue, dragging it face forward with the chain around its neck. Slowly, the bronze bent forward at the knee and ankle, Saddam's huge figure bobbing for a few seconds in a horizontal position as the modest crowd of Iraqis whistled and cheered. Finally, the statue snapped off its plinth, leaving its feet behind. Iraqis ran forward, jumped on it and danced. It was crushed to pieces.

That morning, photojournalist Patrick Baz had been in Saddam City (a neighbourhood of Baghdad later renamed Sadr City). There, he had seen an Iraqi man who had pulled down a different Saddam statue. It was tied to the back of his car with a cable.

Whenever the man saw a group of people, he would stop. They would all crowd around Saddam and start hitting him with their shoes. (Shoes are considered dirty in the Middle East: it is rude to show someone the soles of your shoes, and a terrible insult to hit them with a shoe. In 2008, an Iraqi

journalist would make international news when he threw a shoe [at George W Bush.](#))



Iraqis drag a statue of Saddam Hussein behind their car in Baghdad in April 2003. Photograph: Patrick Baz/EPA

“The image was all the more strong because there wasn’t an American soldier in sight,” Baz later wrote. “Just the locals expressing what they felt about their country’s long-term dictator.” Baz hurried back to his room at the Palestine Hotel to send his pictures to his editors, then heard a commotion outside and witnessed the Firdos Square toppling. Only one of the Saddam topplings made the front pages, and it was not the one that Iraqis had done for themselves. There was a real story here about pulling down a statue in Saddam City. The world’s media preferred the simulation in Firdos Square.

As two hours of non-stop coverage of Firdos Square was beamed around the world that night, the news networks desperately wanted it to have a meaning. Wolf Blitzer of CNN described the footage as “the image that sums up the day and, in many ways, the war itself”. Over on Fox, the anchors agreed. “This transcends anything I’ve ever seen,” said Brit Hume. His colleague agreed: “The important story of the day is this historic shot you are looking at, a noose around the neck of Saddam, put there by the

people of Baghdad.” But it was an American rope, put there by American soldiers.

Between 11am and 8pm on 9 April, Fox News replayed the footage of Saddam’s statue coming down every 4.4 minutes. CNN replayed it every 7.5 minutes. The coverage of Firdos Square – which heavily implied that the statue had been pulled down by a large crowd of cheering Iraqis – suggested that the war was over. The hated dictator was symbolically ousted when his statue fell. In reality, it was not the end. The fighting was still going on. Armed engagements were underway in Baghdad and northern Iraq while the pageant was proceeding in Firdos Square.



Saddam Hussein after his capture in December 2003. Photograph: AP

Saddam would not be captured for another seven months. Stories abounded that he had body doubles: a German TV show suggested in 2002 that there were at least three of them. An Iraqi doctor claimed that the real Saddam had died in 1999 and had been played by doubles ever since. The Dutch researcher Florian Göttke wrote: “Saddam had already multiplied his body and extended his presence throughout the country through his statues, and by the same token, by living through the multiple living bodies of his doppelgängers he would become more than human, he would extend his

presence into the realm of myth – he would even be able to survive his own assassination.”

Saddam’s omnipotence was an illusion, too. When the real Saddam was dragged out of the hole he had been hiding in, it was like the moment in The Wizard of Oz when the curtain is pulled back. Suddenly everyone can see that the Wizard is not some all-powerful demigod, but an ordinary little man who has made his own myth. The real Saddam – scruffy, hairy and wizened – was a world away from the proud statues showing him astride rocket-powered horses.

At the time, the fall of the Firdos Square statue was presented as a satisfying end to the story of the invasion of Iraq. In the weeks after it came down, coverage of the Iraq war on Fox News and CNN decreased by 70%.

On 1 May 2003, Bush stood on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln, nowhere near Iraq but safely off the coast of San Diego. He delivered a speech announcing that major operations in Iraq had ceased. It was, he said, in front of a giant Stars and Stripes banner repeating the message: “Mission accomplished”. (There was a historical echo here of Joe Rosenthal’s iconic shot of US Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima in February 1945. The photograph was widely assumed to signify that victory in the Pacific was imminent: in fact, the Battle of Iwo Jima would go on for another month, and three of the six Marines in the picture would die in it. The war in the Pacific did not end until September 1945.)



President George W Bush aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln off the California coast in May 2003. Photograph: J Scott Applewhite/AP

Baudrillard's argument that the 1991 Gulf war did not take place was not an exact fit for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. But the *end* of that war, as signified by pulling down the statue of Saddam in Firdos Square, was a perfect Baudrillardian simulation. The media turned an impromptu performance by a few American soldiers into a highly convincing television series finale in which the Iraqi people defeated their dictator. It was repeated in broadcasts and newspapers across the world. It was not true.

For those troops fighting the war, and those civilians living through it, the war had only just begun. The coalition had no plan for how to end it: no coherent vision of the Iraq they wanted to emerge. Saddam would be tried and hanged at the end of 2006.

American troops would remain in Baghdad until 21 October 2011, eight-and-a-half years after the statue toppling. Thousands of coalition soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis would die.

After the troops left, Iraq remained divided, damaged and unstable. In 2014, American soldiers would return to take on the threat posed by Isis, which had emerged from the wreckage to make things even worse.

[Why every single statue should come down | Gary Younge](#) [Read more](#)

“Now, when I go past that statue, I feel pain and shame,” said Kadhim al-Jabouri in 2016. “I ask myself: Why did I topple that statue?” He regretted the fall of Saddam’s regime. What came after, in his opinion, was a disaster: “Saddam has gone, but in his place we now have one thousand Saddams.” Kadhim even wanted the statue back. “I’d like to put it back up, to rebuild it,” he said. “But I’m afraid I’d be killed.”

In the state of hyperreality, it is impossible to tell the difference between reality and a simulation of reality. The thing about reality, though, is that it continues to evolve. Sooner or later, the simulation begins to glitch, then ultimately falls apart.

This is an edited extract from [Fallen Idols: Twelve Statues That Made History](#) by Alex von Tunzelmann, published by Headline on 8 July and available at [guardianbookshop.com](#)

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My summer of loveRelationships

My summer of love: ‘I realised intimacy and tingling excitement could exist alongside sadness’

After our GCSEs, my first girlfriend and I took our tent to Reading festival and found levity in a very difficult year



‘Perfect conditions to distract the head and to indulge the heart’ ... Ammar Kalia. Composite: Ammar Kalia/Getty

‘Perfect conditions to distract the head and to indulge the heart’ ... Ammar Kalia. Composite: Ammar Kalia/Getty



[Ammar Kalia](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 05.30 EDT

There is a peculiar romance to British summer music festivals. Some kind of consequence-free hedonism emerges when you combine bouts of torrential rain with the rancid stench of overflowing chemical toilets, the stomach-fizz of morning beers, and the itch of last night's glitter pressed into your unwashed skin. It makes for the perfect conditions to distract the head and, for once, indulge the heart.

It was the summer of 2010 when I camped out at Reading festival, the August blow-out that 16-year-olds from the UK's south-east use as a putrid marker of their transition from secondary school to college; from adolescence to something approaching young adulthood.

The need for summer fun had been building over the course of the previous year. After my mum had noticed abdominal pains while dancing to Prince on her 53rd birthday, a series of inconclusive tests and then a major operation revealed that she had terminal cancer. She was given only six months to live.

Thanks to my teenage hormones, I was also busy unfurling into my own body. While my brain revised for my GCSEs, my mouth was busy kissing girls in the park and sipping drinks that tasted like nail polish remover, my

hands were clumsily rolling cigarettes sprinkled with what was surely dried oregano, my ears decided to like jazz, and my heart – well, my heart would say that it was falling in love.

I finally had my first “proper girlfriend”: someone to go on cinema dates with and to hold hands with while walking down the high street; someone who made the most saccharine of love songs make sense. And as our school study leave gave way to a yawning summer of no responsibilities, it was as if I split into two. Part of me knew that my mum was dying faster than the rest of us, that we were now living the chaos of experimental treatments, and that my mum couldn’t mother me any more; instead, she was the one who needed to be looked after. But I wasn’t sure I actually felt it.

I did, however, feel the euphoria of never having to “do maths” again (or science, or PE), and a paradoxically unwieldy optimism at the world making itself available to me. While my home life closed in on itself, elsewhere it felt as though I could do anything I wanted. I was approaching something like independence: I had a fake ID and eight weeks of partying to look forward to, before I got my exam results and real life intervened once again.

That first summer with my first girlfriend provided levity amid the hardship. The tingling excitement of early romance offset the backdrop of dread at home; crucially, it showed me that intimacy is possible amid sadness. It showed me that people will always seek out connections with each other, regardless of how alone we might feel.

The Reading festival was the apex of that tumultuous, hot and cloudless summer. There we built our little tent together, next to friends’ dangerously large campfires; there I laughed at her while she screamed along to Paramore, and she laughed at me while I jumped to Queens of the Stone Age, and we both silently tried to survive the moshpit for Pendulum.

Of course, a year later we would break up, only to get back together at another festival, before breaking up for good the following year. But that was all still to come and, for a few weeks in 2010, we could pretend that everything outside of us simply ceased to exist.

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My summer of loveRelationships

My summer of love: ‘Four weddings and a surprisingly successful summer fling’

I quit my job for a transatlantic romance and spent June and July getting drunk with my English girlfriend as her friends got hitched



‘I thought it might be the last opportunity to do something grossly irresponsible’ ... Tim Dowling. Composite: Tim Dowling/Getty

‘I thought it might be the last opportunity to do something grossly irresponsible’ ... Tim Dowling. Composite: Tim Dowling/Getty



[Tim Dowling](#)

[@IAmTimDowling](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Most transatlantic romances are, out of necessity, brief: a chance meeting, an expensive visit apiece, followed by an eventual admission of defeat. But this one, begun in the winter of 1990 while I was living in New York, wasn't quite over with. After that second expensive visit, I booked another flight to London for early June. It seemed unlikely that the magazine where I worked would give me the whole summer off for the sake of love, so I quit.

I had just turned 27, and I thought it might be the last opportunity to do something grossly irresponsible, to ignore consequences, to take an extended romantic holiday – featuring plenty of travel, sex and alcohol – before going home to start paying for my choices. I fully expected the relationship to spring a leak at some point; my new English girlfriend had made it pretty clear that a strong part of my appeal was my sell-by date.

What I wasn't expecting was to attend a lot of weddings. I was taken to one straight from the airport, and I'd been to three by the time June ended. It's hard to describe how weird this was: before that year, I'd not only never been to an English wedding, I'd never even been to the wedding of a

contemporary. I didn't know anyone my age who was married. But this seemed to be the summer all my new girlfriend's mates decided to get hitched.

I couldn't really believe anyone in their mid-20s would voluntarily put themselves through such an ordeal in front of all their friends – in front of their parents, even – but everybody seemed used to it, as if they'd already seen this spectacle loads of times. Then everybody, including me, got drunk, and it all seemed fine. But I couldn't help thinking: two of these people are going to wake up not just hungover, but married.

It might have been embarrassing to sit there with her, listening to speeches about people embarking on a lifetime of commitment, but at most English weddings, I learned, you get put at different tables. I generally sat behind a little card with “+1” written on it, next to the vicar, the bride's nanny or the neighbours from the groom's childhood. At one point, I found myself seated next to a pug. I imagined that, years later, these people would look at their wedding photos and think: who's the guy with the dog?



A young Tim Dowling. Image supplied by Tim Dowling

I don't want to make it sound like that's all we did. We also spent two non-consecutive weeks in Cornwall, and another in France. And we went to the

pub a lot. I laid a ceramic tile floor in the kitchen of her new flat, thereby subtracting about £500 from its eventual resale value. We also argued a lot, which I put down to the fact that I was a little bit underfoot. I am not an adventurous person, and yet I had somehow accidentally embarked on an adventure, living in a foreign country, habitually attending the weddings of strangers while wearing unsuitable shoes. I was at sea a lot of the time. I would make people laugh without meaning to, and then spend the rest of the day wondering what I'd said wrong. A boyfriend like me could get on your nerves.

Once, we had an argument that ended with me storming out of the flat and slamming the door behind me. It wasn't until I got to the street that I realised I had no keys, money or friends. After a few minutes of standing in the rain I rang the bell and asked to be let back in. "I'm sorry," she said. "Who is this, please?"

Like all summer romances, this one came to its natural conclusion, in late November. I watched the end of Margaret Thatcher's reign from a bar in Gatwick airport as I waited for my flight home, alone and bereft.

As a summer fling, however, I proved hard to shake off: I was back in March because, oddly enough, I'd been invited to a wedding. I stayed all through the next summer, and went to even more weddings. When I returned the summer after that, it was for my own wedding.

"Don't worry," she said on the day we agreed to get married. "We can always get divorced." And 28 years later, we still can.

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How the BBC let climate deniers walk all over it

[George Monbiot](#)



The fossil-fuel multinationals fund ‘thinktanks’ and ‘research institutes’. But it’s gullible public service broadcasters that give them credibility



Illustration by Eleanor Shakespeare

Illustration by Eleanor Shakespeare

Thu 8 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Yes, we should rake over the coals. And the oil, and the gas. Democratic accountability means remembering who helped to stoke the climate crisis. We should hold the fossil fuel companies to account.

In 1979, an internal study by Exxon concluded that [burning carbon fuels](#) “will cause dramatic environmental effects before the year 2050”. In 1982, as the Guardian’s Climate Crimes [series recalls](#), an Exxon memo concluded that the science of climate change was “unanimous”. Then it poured [millions of dollars](#) into lobby groups casting doubt on it.

They didn’t call themselves lobby groups, but “thinktanks” or “research institutes”. Across the world, the media took them at their word.

So scientists and environmental campaigners found themselves fighting the oil companies at one step removed, and with one hand tied behind their backs. When some of us were pitched against a “thinktank” in the media, if we tried to explain that it was not what it claimed to be, or asked it to reveal its funders, we were accused of being “conspiracy theorists”, or of “playing

the man not the ball". But if we didn't, its false claims about climate science were given equal or greater weight. After all, who were we, a threadbare bunch, beside those respectable-sounding institutes with offices in Washington or Westminster?

[BBC removes Bitesize page on climate change 'benefits' after backlash](#)

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When we [criticised the media](#) for its determined naivety, we were frozen out. Before long, the thinktanks and trade associations had a clear run. They were the serious, sensible people, [to whom the media turned](#) to explain the world. And still turns.

If the oil companies are to be held to account, so should the media that amplified their voices. It scarcely needs to be said that the billionaire press took the lead in attacking climate science. After all, the owners have long perceived an attack on one corporation or plutocrat as an [attack on all](#). But far more dangerous were the public sector broadcasters – which tend to be taken more seriously, as they are widely seen as independent and unbiased.

For Channel 4, winding up environmentalists became a blood sport. In films such as [Against Nature](#) and [The Great Global Warming Swindle](#), the mistakes and distortions came so thick and fast that it was hard to see them as anything but deliberate provocations. When I complained, the channel sought to justify them with [further unfounded claims](#). All that counted was noise: Channel 4, at the time, clearly couldn't give a damn about the impacts.

The BBC's role was more insidious. Its collaboration arose from a disastrous combination of gullibility, appeasement and scientific ignorance. It let the fossil fuel industry [walk all over it](#).

When some of us pointed out that failing to ask its contributors to reveal their sources of funding was a direct breach of its own [editorial guidelines](#), the BBC produced a series of bizarre, [catch-22 excuses](#), and carried on breaking its rules for several years. It gave the oil and tobacco companies just what they wanted: in the words of the [American Petroleum Institute](#),

“victory will be achieved” when “recognition of uncertainties becomes part of the ‘conventional wisdom’”.

Only in 2018, a mere 36 years after Exxon came to the same conclusion, did the BBC decide that [climate science is solid](#), and there is no justification for both-sidesing it. But the nonsense continues.

Last week, a group of us revealed what the BBC has been [teaching children about climate breakdown](#). The GCSE module on BBC Bitesize listed the “positive” impacts of our global catastrophe. [Among them](#) were “more resources, such as oil, becoming available in places such as Alaska and Siberia when the ice melts”; “new tourist destinations becoming available” (welcome to Derby-on-Sea); and “warmer temperatures could lead to healthier outdoor lifestyles”.

In a sterling example of the corporation’s endless confusion between balance and impartiality, the list of positives was roughly equal to the list of negatives. The greatest crisis humanity has ever faced looked like six of one and half a dozen of the other.

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Only when it caused a social media storm did the [BBC](#) remove this content. I asked it how, when and why this list was included, whether external organisations were involved, and why the corporation ignored previous requests to improve the module. It told me it would not be commenting. So much for public service.

The frontier of denial has now shifted to the biggest of all environmental issues: farming. Here, the BBC still gives lobby groups and trade associations [sowing doubt about environmental damage](#) (especially by livestock farming) more airtime than the scientists and campaigners seeking to explain the problems.

Not just airtime, but kudos. The head of the National Farmers’ Union, Minette Batters, has sought to undermine the [ban on neonicotinoid pesticides](#), pressed for continuation of the cruel and useless [badger cull](#), and

lobbied against [reductions in meat consumption](#), among other harmful positions. But last year, BBC's Woman's Hour included her on its [power list](#) of "30 inspiring women whose work is making a significant positive contribution to the environment". She was placed above true environmental heroes such as Gail Bradbrook, Judy Ling-Wong, Franny Armstrong and Safia Minney. The BBC continues to confuse mainstream with respectable, and respectable with right.

The lesson, to my mind, is obvious: if we fail to hold organisations to account for their mistakes and obfuscations, they'll keep repeating them. Climate crimes have perpetrators. They also have facilitators.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist
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Why declining birth rates are good news for life on Earth

[Laura Spinney](#)

In the midst of a climate crisis with 8 billion humans on the globe, it's absurd to say that what's lacking is babies



‘Trying to force people to have either more or fewer babies turns out to be rather pointless.’ Photograph: William West/AFP/Getty Images

‘Trying to force people to have either more or fewer babies turns out to be rather pointless.’ Photograph: William West/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 8 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

Fertility rates are [falling](#) across the globe – even in places, such as sub-Saharan Africa, where they remain high. This is good for women, families, societies and the environment. So why do we keep hearing that the world needs babies, with [angst in the media](#) about maternity wards closing in Italy and ghost cities in China?

The short-range answer is that, even though this slowdown was predicted as part of the now 250-year-old demographic transition – whose signature is the tumbling of both fertility and mortality rates – occasional happenings, such as the [publication](#) of US census data or China's [decision](#) to relax its two-child policy, force it back into our consciousness, arousing fears about family lines rubbed out and diminishing superpowers being uninvited from the top table.

The longer range answer is that our notion of a healthy, vibrant society is still rooted in the past. The inevitable byproduct of the demographic transition is that populations age, in a chronological sense, but life expectancy, and particularly healthy life expectancy, have increased dramatically over the last half-century, and the societal definition of “old” has not kept up (though artistic experiments such as [casting](#) 82-year-old Sir Ian McKellen as Hamlet might help to challenge age-related stereotypes).

In the 19th century, a country needed youth to operate its factories, consume what they churned out and constitute a fighting force in times of war. That became less true over the 20th century, and in the 21st it bears very little relation to reality. More and more of the jobs that require stamina and strength – including fighting – are done by machines, while a nation’s products are consumed globally.

Gross domestic product (GDP) might influence a nation’s geopolitical standing and a large GDP fills government coffers, but there’s no evidence that young workers are any more productive than older ones today. Twenty-somethings and 50-somethings have different kinds of intelligence, says gerontologist Sarah Harper of the University of Oxford, but both play a part in entrepreneurship. And if you care about human wellbeing you should pay more attention to GDP per person than per country.

Demographer Ron Lee of the University of California, Berkeley, and others have [shown](#) that GDP per person, and hence living standards, are highest when fertility falls just below replacement level (around 2.1 births per woman) – to 1.6 or even less. When fertility is either much higher or much lower than that, quality of life falls off again. Lee would be worried if he was South Korea at 0.8 births per woman, or China at an estimated 1.3, he

says, but England and Wales (1.6), the European Union (1.5) and the US (1.6) are all hovering around that sweet spot.

[Are there too many people? All bets are off](#)

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That doesn't mean we don't have to adapt to the new reality. We do, in part because the way many countries distribute resources is also rooted in the 19th century and is unsustainable. More people need to work longer, for example. Although creativity doesn't fall off with age, skills change, and we need to replenish those that are lost from the workforce. And when elderly people do finally stop being productive, we need to find new ways and new workers to care for them.

Immigration – which tends to bring in young adults – is a critical component of that adaptation, smoothing the demographic transition for richer countries while redistributing capital to poorer ones where fertility rates remain relatively high. The evidence is overwhelming that, in general, immigration is [good for societies](#) – economically, but also socially. Closing doors to it is, in this sense, self-destructive.

So there's work to do, but in a world in the grip of a climate crisis, to which we've added 7 of the nearly 8 billion humans in just a couple of centuries – and to which we will almost certainly [add](#) another 3 billion before our numbers start falling again – it's absurd to say that what's lacking is babies.

In fact, trying to force people to have either more or fewer babies turns out to be rather pointless. Despite China's decades-long one-child policy, its fertility decline hasn't been dramatically steeper than elsewhere in East Asia. France's valiant efforts to encourage large families with financial incentives haven't made much difference either, compared with the rest of Europe. As child mortality drops, and women's health and education improve, fertility falls. Parents choose to invest more time, money and love in fewer children. You can sway their decisions slightly by making life harder or easier for families – through childcare provision, say, or parental leave allowances – but the demographic transition is unstoppable.

The climate crisis is an interesting case, because saving the planet is often the reason people give for deciding to have fewer or no children – rather than, say, improving living standards for their fellow humans more directly – but it's not clear what impact such decisions will have on the climate. We know the climate crisis and human population growth are linked, but not exactly how. Six births per woman is demonstrably bad for the environment, but for anything up to two the evidence is far more ambiguous. Rather than deny yourself children if you want them, Harper says, better to have one or two and raise them as environmentally conscious consumers. Policies limiting carbon emissions and plastic waste would be far more effective and timely tools for undoing or at least mitigating the damage we've done to the planet.

Covid-19 has temporarily exacerbated the longer-term decline in fertility rates. This, too, was predictable. Familiarity breeds contempt and children, quipped Mark Twain, but only the first part holds in a pandemic. As more data comes in on this, expect more headlines about once-great nations abstaining themselves into oblivion. Don't believe them. We do need solutions, but they don't have to look like babies.

- Laura Spinney is a science journalist and the author of *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*
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OpinionAgeing

Let's recognise that older people get depressed, too – and get them the help they need

Adrian Chiles



Too often the prevailing attitude seems to be: ‘They’re knackered and lonely – what do you expect?’



‘It doesn’t help that older people tend to be less open to discussing their feelings’ Photograph: Dean Mitchell/Getty Images/posed by model

‘It doesn’t help that older people tend to be less open to discussing their feelings’ Photograph: Dean Mitchell/Getty Images/posed by model

Thu 8 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

When I was a kid, I couldn’t understand why old people weren’t in a constant state of panic. I would look at my grandad, sitting there quietly reading the Birmingham Evening Mail, and wonder how he could stay so calm. How come he wasn’t as horrified as I was at the prospect of him dying before too long? If I was him, I thought, I would be running around the garden screaming in despair and terror. I just didn’t get it, and to some extent I still don’t, which is a considerable worry since I’m a good deal closer to old age than childhood myself.

Sorry to sound so miserable. Do read on; there are some positive thoughts further down.

Rather than panicking, an awful lot of the older people of my acquaintance are miserably unhappy. Most of my friends are in their 50s, with parents in their late 70s and 80s. When we ask each other how our mums and dads are doing, the answers are distressingly similar. Yes, there are those who are

batting on, still hitting boundaries, determined to make the most of their innings no matter what, but many of them are just in despair. They're generally unhappy and anxious and no longer find much joy in the things they used to enjoy. In all other age groups these would be considered classic symptoms of depression and, hopefully, treated accordingly. But when it comes to older adults the prevailing attitude seems to be: "Well, they're old and knackered and probably lonely – what do you expect?"

For this reason, I suspected, depression among older people might be underdiagnosed and under-treated. Unusually, for me, it turns out I was right. "Sadly, it isn't just people generally who think old people are bound to be depressed," Charlotte Lynch of Age UK told me. "It's health professionals as well. They often take the same view and think: well, they're living with multiple long-term conditions and they're in a lot of pain – of course they're going to feel like that. So let's focus on their physical health instead of mental health. And the same level of support isn't there for older people."

I have spoken to a number of eminent specialists in the field of old-age psychiatry, and they all tell the same story of depression being normalised in older people. Their frustration is that this leads to diagnoses often not being sought or given, when all the evidence suggests that both talking therapies and medication are at least as effective for older people as they are for everyone else.

It doesn't help that older people tend to be less open to discussing their feelings, for all kinds of reasons. Age UK says this is partly generational; they even suspect some older patients are at some level fearful that a discussion with a doctor over their mental health could lead to any manner of problems, up to and including being carted off to an asylum. More commonly, the charity says, they are actually up for the conversation with a doctor but don't know how to go about it, and some GPs aren't much help. "They presume, particularly when it comes to older men, that the patient might not want to talk about it, so, not wanting to make them feel uncomfortable, it's better to leave it," Lynch says. "In fact a lot of older people want to be asked, but they just don't know how to start the conversation."

Starting this conversation, in my experience, can be tricky for all concerned. A close friend of mine whose father is in poor physical health suggested to his mum that his dad might also be depressed. This went down badly, as if the very idea was somewhere between disrespectful and insulting. And there the conversation ended. I strongly suspect this scene is playing out daily in many families. And another old person, one way or another, goes without mental health support, when they've perhaps needed it most in their long lives. It doesn't have to be this way.

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‘Living with the virus’ makes no sense. Only half of the UK is fully vaccinated

[Anthony Costello](#)

We’re heading towards 100,000 Covid cases a day, yet ministers laud ‘freedom day’. It seems no one is accountable



Illustration by Thomas Pullin

Illustration by Thomas Pullin

Wed 7 Jul 2021 11.14 EDT

After receiving my second vaccination in April, I contracted Covid a week ago. I’m now “living with the virus”, a phrase emblematic of the failure of UK public health. Just look at the relative death rates in China (population 1.4 billion), Vietnam (100 million), the United States (340 million) and the UK (68 million). When plotted on the [same graph](#), you cannot see the death curves for those two Asian states because they are so low.

Britain’s leaders and their advisers told us last year that we could not suppress the virus. China and Vietnam did, within six weeks. They told us

these countries would inevitably face a huge second wave. They haven't; just smaller outbreaks, suppressed with good public health practice implemented by people on the ground.

As we know, exploding cases in March 2020 forced the UK into a 13-week full national lockdown, with huge damage to livelihoods, the economy and mental health. None of the east Asian states had national lockdowns, only local ones. In 2020, China's GDP grew by 2% and Vietnam's by 2.9%, according to the World Bank, compared with the [UK's 9.9% contraction](#).

Last summer the UK government set up a privatised, call centre-based test-and-trace system divorced from our underfunded local public health and primary care teams – quite unlike anything done in successful east Asian states. It couldn't possibly work, and it didn't. The Treasury refused to give any financial support to poorer people to isolate – in case, as the then health secretary, Matt Hancock, told a Commons select committee, they "gamed the system". So poor families gamed the test-and-trace system instead, to keep working and feed their families. The virus simply spread, without public health control, and was only suppressed by two more prolonged national lockdowns.

The vaccines arrived with a huge wave of nationalistic fervour. We are world leaders, crowed the prime minister. The first to jab. Yes, our GP network stepped in magnificently to roll out the vaccines, but local authorities and public health remained deprived of any financial support. Meanwhile, test and trace staggered on, a fortune spent on private consultants, test companies and cronies. The £37bn spent was equivalent to a decade's funding for the whole UK public health programme.

So the third lockdown now ends in a staggered and collapsing roadmap. In February the chief scientific adviser, Patrick Vallance, was alone among advisers saying that find, test, trace and isolate was crucial when case rates fell to low levels. On 19 May, we saw only [1,517 cases a day](#). Yet no changes were made to our ineffective test-and-trace system – it remained outsourced, with the [lowest rate of financial compensation](#) for isolation in any OECD country. So another wave began.

How your mask protects other people – video explainer

[Ditching England's Covid restrictions is a dangerous experiment | Deepa Gurdasani](#)

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On Monday the prime minister told us we would have 50,000 cases a day by his so-called “freedom day” on 19 July. A day later the health secretary, Sajid Javid, said we could hit 100,000 a day this summer. But it was OK, he told us. We can “live with the virus” because we are all vaccinated.

Well, all except children, and the poorest and most hesitant groups. Actually, only half Britain’s population (34 million) is fully protected with vaccines. Yes, admissions and deaths will go up, but the government can’t say by how much. The possibility of the virus becoming vaccine-resistant was not mentioned. Vaccine protection appears [much less effective](#) at stopping infection than it does at preventing serious illness or death. Talk of long Covid is seemingly taboo among ministers, even though the latest government figures show [more than 2 million people](#) have lived with symptoms for at least 12 weeks. A [new study](#) has found measurable thinning of the brain cortex areas covering taste and smell in these patients.

And the government seems to think it fine for 8.8 million children up to age 16 to become infected – even though the US, Europe and Israel have vaccinated more than 7 million children because the [benefits clearly outweigh the risks](#). Our vaccine committee is still thinking about it. Meanwhile, even in English school classrooms, masks are no longer required.

And what of the global vaccine shortage? At last month’s G7 meeting in Cornwall, President Joe Biden urged fellow leaders to share the patent with all countries so they can manufacture the vaccine themselves. The UK, Germany and Canada said no. Although 95% of funds to develop vaccines came from the public purse, it appears that the shareholders of big pharma companies must be protected. So a million people must die every month to sustain free markets.

New variants will emerge, but those same multinationals can make new vaccines – no doubt with new patents. No new G7 money was committed to

the Covax global distribution scheme. And with Indian supplies blocked, Nepal, Bangladesh and the whole of Africa have virtually no vaccines.

Under the new libertarian public health system, “living with the virus” means we must not compromise people’s freedom to do what they like. If you prefer to cough and sneeze in a crowded commuter train, so be it: there’ll be no legal restriction on that. If porters, nurses, doctors, care workers, bus drivers or factory workers become infected, and if some of them die, so be it.

Seemingly no one is accountable. Politicians say they follow the science. Advisers say ministers must make the decisions. An explosion of cases is imminent, the burden on the NHS could be severe, and the threat of new variants that can break through the present vaccine protection is real, as I know. Rather than a merry-go-round of birthday honours and George Crosses, we need a plan to deal with the rampant third wave – one that will keep us safe.

- Anthony Costello is professor of global health and sustainable development at University College London
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'Heat dome' probably killed 1bn marine animals on Canada coast, experts say



Dead mussels at the waterline in British Columbia. Photograph: Christopher Harley

Dead mussels at the waterline in British Columbia. Photograph: Christopher Harley

British Columbia scientist says heat essentially cooked mussels: 'The shore doesn't usually crunch when you walk'

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[Leyland Cecco in Toronto](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

More than 1 billion marine animals along Canada's Pacific coast are likely to have died from last week's [record heatwave](#), experts warn, highlighting the vulnerability of ecosystems unaccustomed to extreme temperatures.

The "heat dome" that settled over western [Canada](#) and the north-western US for five days pushed temperatures in communities along the coast to 40C (104F) – shattering longstanding records and offering little respite for days.

The intense and unrelenting heat is believed to [have killed as many as 500 people](#) in the province of British Columbia and contributed to [the hundreds of wildfires currently burning across the province](#).

[Record heatwave may have killed 500 people in western Canada](#)

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But experts fear it also had a devastating impact on marine life.

Christopher Harley, a marine biologist at the University of British Columbia, has calculated that more than a billion marine animals may have been killed

by the unusual heat.

A walk along a Vancouver-area beach highlighted the magnitude of devastation brought on by the heatwave, he said.

“The shore doesn’t usually crunch when you walk on it. But there were so many empty mussel shells lying everywhere that you just couldn’t avoid stepping on dead animals while walking around,” he said.

Harley was struck by the smell of rotting mussels, many of which were in effect cooked by the abnormally warm water. Snails, sea stars and clams were decaying in the shallow water. “It was an overpowering, visceral experience,” he said.

While the air around Vancouver hovered around the high 30s (about 100F), Harley and a student used infrared cameras to record temperatures above 50C (122F) along the rocky shore.

“It was so hot when I was out with a student that we collected data for a little bit and then retreated to the shade and ate frozen grapes,” said Harley. “But of course, the mussels, sea stars and clams don’t have that option.”



‘A square meter of mussel bed could be home to several dozen or even one hundred species,’ said Christopher Harley. Photograph: Christopher Harley

Mussels are hardy shellfish, tolerating temperatures into the high 30s. Barnacles are even sturdier, surviving the mid-40s (about 113F) for at least a few hours.

“But when the temperatures get above that, those are just unsurvivable conditions,” he said.

The mass death of shellfish would temporarily affect water quality because mussels and clams help filter the sea, Harley said, keeping it clear enough that sunlight reaches the eelgrass beds while also creating habitats for other species.

“A square meter of mussel bed could be home to several dozen or even one hundred species,” he said. The tightly bunched way mussels live also informed Harley’s calculation of the scope of the loss.

“You can fit thousands on to an area the size of a stove top. And there are hundreds of kilometres of rocky beach that are hospitable to mussels. Each time you scale up, the numbers just keep getting bigger and bigger. And that’s just mussels. A lot of sea life would have died.”

While mussels can regenerate over a period of two years, a number of starfish and clams live for decades, and they reproduce more slowly, so their recovery is probably going to take longer.

Harley has also received reports from colleagues of dead sea anemones, rock fish and oysters.

[Canadian inferno: northern heat exceeds worst-case climate models](#)

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Experts have cautioned that the province needs to adapt to the reality that sudden and sustained heatwaves are likely to become more common as a result of climate change.

Another heatwave is expected to strike the western United States and southwestern Canada in the coming week, highlighting the relentlessness of the dry summer heat.

“The nerdy ecologist part of me is excited to see what will happen in the coming years,” said Harley. “But most of the rest of me is kind of depressed by it. A lot of species are not going to be able to keep up with the pace of change. Ecosystems are going to change in ways that are really difficult to predict. We don’t know where the tipping points are.”

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Eswatini protests: ‘we are fighting a liberation struggle’

Dozens have died seeking reforms to African kingdom where many are dubious about authorities’ offer of talks



People take pictures of a damaged shop in Mbabane, Eswatini, following protests. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

People take pictures of a damaged shop in Mbabane, Eswatini, following protests. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Jason Burke](#) Africa correspondent

Thu 8 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

Authorities in [Eswatini](#) have promised a “national dialogue” in an attempt to avert further unrest after dozens died and hundreds of businesses were

burned down in weeks of protest in Africa's only remaining absolute monarchy.

The move has been greeted with scepticism by opposition leaders and analysts, with fears of further violence in the landlocked country of 1.3 million if there are no significant reforms to the autocratic political system.

The UN expressed deep concern on Tuesday at the reaction of authorities in Eswatini, [which was formerly known as Swaziland](#), to recent protests and sporadic looting, calling for an independent investigation into allegations of "disproportionate and unnecessary use of force, harassment and intimidation" by security forces.

The allegations include "the use of live ammunition by police", a UN spokesperson said, adding that the organisation was worried by "the potential for further unrest".

[Armed forces open fire in crackdown on anti-monarchy protests in Eswatini](#)

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Protests by mainly young people in [Eswatini](#), which has been ruled by 53-year-old King Mswati for 35 years, started when a law student was murdered in May in circumstances that suggested police involvement. But unrest intensified dramatically last month when authorities said they would refuse any further "petitions" to the king, closing one of the few ways in which complaints and grievances could be expressed in the kingdom.

Protests that followed led to a more general breakdown in law and order, with sporadic arson and looting. With police overwhelmed, the army was deployed "to regain the rule of law, [restore] peace and to protect all", said acting prime minister Themba Masuku in a statement.

Observers say there are echoes in Eswatini of protests and violence elsewhere in Africa which have pitted educated and connected urban youth against long-standing rulers and elites. In Uganda, where the median age is 17, [Bobi Wine, a popular singer turned politician](#), has challenged the rule of veteran president Yoweri Museveni and provoked harsh repression. In Nigeria too, a youthful population with new aspirations of prosperity,

security and freedom [have taken to the streets to protest and been met with violence.](#)

“We are fighting for democracy, freedom, jobs and for food. Yes, there were some people who tried to exploit the protests for their own agenda but ... they were not our people. We are fighting a liberation struggle, not stealing,” said one 26-year-old student leader contacted by the Guardian in Eswatini, who requested anonymity for fear of arrest.

[Swaziland king's Facebook exposure of party lifestyle could lose him friends](#)
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The country’s [median age is 21](#) and unemployment is at more than 40%. Though the king lives in ostentatious luxury, with [a fleet of luxury cars](#), private jets, numerous palaces and 15 wives, almost 60% of his subjects live in poverty, [according to the World Bank](#). A large royal family also enjoys an opulent lifestyle, and members have unashamedly posted images of their extravagance on social media.

Though some local-level representatives are elected, the king effectively chooses MPs, controls parliaments and appoints ministers, analysts say. Dissidents have long been silenced by a raft of repressive laws, with the largest opposition party, People’s United Democratic Movement (Pudemo), banned under terrorism laws.

Menzi Ndhlovu, an analyst with Signal Risks, a South Africa-based threat advisory firm, said there had been successive waves of protest in Eswatini, including widespread unrest in 2011 dubbed the “Swazi spring”.

“It’s a fairly familiar process. The authorities first repress and contain, then offer some concessions. The aim is basically to preserve the status quo,” Ndhlovu said.

However, this time a tipping point may have been reached.

“The offer of a national dialogue is an attempt by government and monarchy to calm and appease the masses. I don’t think there is any intent to carry out

serious reform ... We could well see a second wave of protests," he told the Guardian.

Officials admit that at least 27 people had been killed, some by police, others by security guards hired to prevent looting. Opposition leaders say at least twice as many have died. More than 150 are thought to have been injured.

Chris Vandome, an expert at London's Chatham House, said the recent protests differed from early episodes of unrest in which unions and other formal organisations had played a significant role.

"This time it is more organic and less structured. That makes it much harder to control but also harder for the protesters to have a cohesive position on what they want ... A national dialogue is a first step but does that mean you respect the legitimacy of the people you are dialoguing with?" he said.

Officials in Eswatini admit there are problems in the kingdom but say the unrest was due to "terrorists" and "rabble rousers" from South Africa.

Manqoba Khumalo, a senator and Eswatini's minister of commerce, industry and trade, told the Guardian that though last week had been "horrible" Eswatini had returned to normal.

"What is being portrayed [by media outside the kingdom] is sensationalism. We are short of some supplies and a lot of shops were burned so that makes things difficult but there are no protests at the moment, no vandalism and nothing has been looted since Saturday morning," he said.

Khumalo said that security forces had intervened when authorities "had been made aware of a grand plan to sow a trail of destruction" in Eswatini. Without offering evidence, he alleged the plan involved the Economic Freedom Fighters, a radical leftwing political party in neighbouring South Africa.

"The EFF was bringing in people to lead the destruction and who would train and mentor its local branch to do this ... We were able to intercept the plan on the internet. We had to protect business and security for all citizens. It was beyond a protest," the minister said.

The government claim violence preceded the ban on petitions – though opposition parties deny this, saying that protests turned violent in response to harsh measures and police violence.

Internet access has been limited, straining communication. Banks and many shops remain shut, hundreds of others have been burned out, and many petrol stations had run out of petrol.

Amnesty international described “[a full-frontal assault on human rights](#)” in the former British protectorate, and Wandile Dladlu, secretary general of Pudemo, accused authorities of a disproportionate response.

“These people are unarmed... ... but the amount of force that the state is responding with, on the basis that people looted... ... is brazen dictatorship,” Dladlu said.

Two witnesses contacted by the Guardian described wild and indiscriminate firing of live ammunition by police, the army and some private security guards in response to looting and arson attacks directed primarily at businesses linked to the king.

In a statement, the Swaziland Union of Students said the dead were “unarmed citizens who are genuinely calling for political change”.

Khumalo said it was inevitable that the government “needs to address grievances” through a national dialogue “based on our constitution” but said that this could only take place after Covid-19 “had subsided”.

“We would like to sooner but we will not have this dictated to us ... by rabble rousers or those who instigate violence,” he told the Guardian.

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Outrage over shutdown of LGBTQ WeChat accounts in China

Dozens of WeChat accounts have been blocked and deleted without warning



Attempts to access the LGBTQ WeChat accounts were met with an error message. Photograph: Andre M Chang/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

Attempts to access the LGBTQ WeChat accounts were met with an error message. Photograph: Andre M Chang/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

[Vincent Ni](#) China affairs correspondent and [Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

Thu 8 Jul 2021 06.03 EDT

An online clampdown on social media accounts associated with China's campus LGBTQ movement has sparked outrage, solidarity and backlash against the authorities' treatment of the country's sexual and gender minorities.

Dozens of WeChat accounts run by LGBTQ university students were blocked and then deleted on Tuesday without warning. Some of the accounts – a mix of registered student clubs and unofficial grassroots groups – had operated for years as safe spaces for China’s LGBTQ youth, with tens of thousands of followers.

Attempts to access the WeChat accounts were met with an error message that said the content had been blocked and the account deactivated “after receiving relevant complaints”. Other messages said the accounts had “violated regulations on the management of accounts offering public information service on the Chinese internet”, Reuters reported.

[China's LGBTQ+ community seize census chance to stand up and be counted](#)

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The shutdowns have added to concern over China’s worsening intolerance of sexual and gender minorities and activism, which has also [targeted feminist groups](#) and [individuals who have sought to push back](#) against discrimination.

On Weibo, a post by the Shihe Society at Fudan University confirming the shutdown of its WeChat account was shared tens of thousands of times. “We were able to create a reliable channel with the outside, but now our communication will largely rely on Weibo and private WeChat groups,” it said.

Many Weibo comments appeared to be deleted quickly, but others expressed anger at the censorship. “Every love deserves to be seen and respected,” said one.

“I can’t believe this happened in 2021, I can’t believe it happened in the universities which should have the most pioneering spirit and be teaching people tolerance and respect,” said another.

The US state department spokesperson, Ned Price, said the department was aware of the shutdowns and was concerned that China had restricted the accounts of groups that were “merely expressing their views, exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of speech”.

China's social media giants routinely censor content considered to be politically or culturally sensitive, but it is often unclear if such decisions come from government directions or are made internally, based on what is believed to be expected by government.

On Wednesday afternoon the Weibo account of Zhou Xiaoxuan, popularly known as Xianzi, was suspended for a year for violating "Weibo complaint regulations". Xianzi is seen as a key figure of China's #MeToo movement after she accused her former employer, a popular television host, of sexual harassment.

Tencent, the parent company of WeChat, did not explain the reasons behind the mass takedowns, and declined to comment when contacted by the Guardian.

The feminist activist Xiong Jing said the shutdowns were "quite a strong signal that the authorities don't welcome anything that 'contravenes' mainstream values".

"Both feminist and LGBT student organisations are seen as being influenced by western values or manipulated by foreign powers, so: purge them all," she said. "This is not only homophobia but also political stigma towards non-governmental groups [including students clubs] in a continuous crackdown on civil society in China."

Darius Longarino, a senior fellow at Yale law school's Paul Tsai China Center, who researches LGBTQ rights in China, said this week's developments were not surprising in the current climate.

"A degree of official indifference had allowed [China's] LGBT advocacy to thrive in a grey space, but that space is now being squeezed down," said Longarino.

Homosexuality in China was illegal until 1997, and classified as a mental health disorder until 2001. And while public acceptance – and commercial capitalisation – of the LGBTQ community in China has grown, authorities have not followed in step. The authorities' slow squeeze of China's LGBTQ

community has been going on for some years, but until recently was often met with activists' pushback.

[In 2015](#) a Chinese film-maker sued state administrators in a quest to discover how and why his gay-themed documentary was removed from local streaming sites. He eventually won the case. [In 2018](#), after an outcry, the social media platform Weibo reversed a controversial publishing ban that lumped homosexual content in with pornographic and violent material.

But activists said the space for activism has become visibly smaller in the last few years. In 2019, Weibo reportedly purged all comments and posts featuring the hashtag #les, in reference to lesbians. Weibo users also reported they were no longer able to use the rainbow flag in their bios.

Last year Shanghai Pride, the country's only major annual celebration of sexual minorities, abruptly announced its shutdown. In an open letter, the organisers of the event said the move meant "the end of the rainbow" for them. "It's been a great 12-year ride, and we are honoured and proud to have traveled this journey of raising awareness and promoting diversity for the LGBTQ community," they wrote.

Amid increasing nationalism online, some corners of China's internet have also sought to link, without evidence, LGBTQ and rights groups with foreign interference or "anti-China" forces.

Hu Xijin, the editor of the nationalistic, state-owned tabloid the Global Times, wrote in [a WeChat article](#) that the state puts "no restriction on sexual minorities' lifestyle choices", but that LGBT people should "be more patient" and "not try to become a high-profile ideology".

Longarino said it was hard to tell whether the latest suppression marked a complete shutdown of such discussions on the Chinese internet. "My sense is that the short term is going to continue to be treacherous sailing, but the LGBT movement's gains over the last two decades, in terms of its community-building and broadening of public support, coupled with its impressive resilience, can see it through," he said.

In New York, a spontaneous art exhibition to commemorate the deleted WeChat accounts is being planned for this week. Organisers of the event called on participants to bring their own poems, graffiti and rainbow flags to highlight censorship.

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[Abortion](#)

‘Radicalized’ anti-abortion movement poses increased threat, US warned

Comments from Anu Kumar of reproductive rights group Ipas come as militant anti-abortion groups gain legislative influence



States enacted 90 abortion restrictions in 2021, breaking the previous record of 89 in 2011. Photograph: Mary F Calvert/Reuters

States enacted 90 abortion restrictions in 2021, breaking the previous record of 89 in 2011. Photograph: Mary F Calvert/Reuters

Jessica Glenza

@JessicaGlenza

Thu 8 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

The president and chief executive of an international reproductive rights non-profit has warned that the American anti-abortion movement has

significantly radicalized and is working to spread its ideology around the world.

The comments came as [pro-gun anti-abortion theocratic militant groups](#) who seek to prosecute women who have abortions under murder statutes have gained increasing [legislative influence](#) in the US.

[‘It shakes you to your core’: the anti-abortion extremists gaining ground on the right](#)

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“In the 90s we saw groups like Operation Rescue and Operation Save America, and they were quite violent,” said Anu Kumar of [Ipas](#), an international non-governmental organization that works to expand access to contraception and abortion.

“This recent uptick is really an even more radicalized version of what we saw back then, and in some ways it’s not your mother’s anti-choice groups.”

Operation Save America denies condoning violence, though leaders of affiliated groups such as Defy Tyrants, led by Matt Trewhella, were signatories to a statement which described murdering abortion providers as “justifiable homicide”.

Since Donald Trump left office, and as the US suffered among the worst Covid outbreaks in the world, Republican legislatures have worked to make 2021 the most hostile year for abortion since the procedure was legalized nationally in 1973.

States enacted 90 abortion restrictions in 2021, breaking the previous record of 89 in 2011. These restrictions stand in contrast to the “unmistakable trend toward the liberalization of abortion laws” globally, according to the [Council on Foreign Relations](#). Since 2000, more than 28 nations have liberalized their abortion laws. Only one, [Nicaragua](#), restricted legal grounds for abortion.

At the same time, the constitutional right to abortion has never been so perilously close to being removed since 1973, when the supreme court

decided the landmark case Roe v Wade.

Late this year the supreme court is expected to hear a case out of Mississippi called [Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization](#), which will consider whether a 15-week abortion ban is constitutional. Because Roe allows pregnant people to have an abortion up to the point of viability, roughly understood to be 24 weeks, scholars speculate the court could substantially redefine people's right to abortion.

"The reason they're different, and it's important, is they are not interested in incremental change. They're not interested in using regulations. They're not even that interested in Roe," said Kumar.

"What they're militant about is defying the courts, defying the constitution and defying the rule of law," she said. "And they use scripture to justify their violence. Yes they are definitely anti-abortion, they are misogynist, they are anti-immigrant as well.

"But fundamentally they are about democracy – they are anti-democratic zealots, this is not just about abortion at all."

Mainstream anti-abortion groups have placed [multimillion-dollar bets](#) on restricting voting rights, while militant groups have openly advocated for theocracy, while also experiencing newfound success in conservative legislatures. [In Oklahoma, Texas and Arizona](#), state lawmakers have all introduced legislation to make abortion a crime punishable under murder statutes.

"White supremacy is the thread that ties everything together," said Kumar. "From the insurrection we saw on 6 January to the racial uprisings to the uptick in anti-abortion legislation [in the US]," she said.

Kumar added that, while the most militant groups have small direct memberships, their ideology has proved sufficiently appealing to attract legislators and new followers.

"This is the bright shining light that needs to be put on this issue, that all people should be concerned about these groups," said Kumar. "Because their

agenda is really big and far-reaching.”

This article was amended on 9 July 2021. Nicaragua has restricted its abortion laws since 2000, not expanded them as stated in an earlier version.

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[Dubai](#)

Explosion at Dubai's Jebel Ali port sends tremors across city

Fiery blast on container ship was powerful enough to be seen from space by satellite

00:51

Large explosion on container ship at Jebel Ali port rocks Dubai – video

AP in Dubai

Wed 7 Jul 2021 21.31 EDT

A container ship anchored at [Dubai](#)'s port caught fire late on Wednesday, causing a huge explosion that sent tremors across the United Arab Emirates' commercial hub.

The blaze sent up giant orange flames on a vessel at the crucial Jebel Ali port, the busiest in the Middle East, and unleashed a shock wave through the skyscraper-studded city, causing walls and windows to shake in neighbourhoods as far as 25 kilometres (15 miles) away.

[Graphic](#)

Panicked residents filmed from their high-rises as a fiery ball illuminated the night sky. The blast was powerful enough to be seen from space by satellite.

There were no immediate reports of casualties at the port, which is also the busiest port of call for American warships outside the US.

Two and a half hours after the explosion, Dubai's civil defence teams said they had brought the fire under control and started the "cooling process." Authorities posted footage on social media of firefighters dousing giant

shipping containers. The glow of the blaze remained visible in the background.

الحرق تحت السيطرة ولا توجد أي وفيات أو إصابات جراء الحادث في ميناء جبل علي
pic.twitter.com/cQAVRDSa5c

— Dubai Media Office (@DXBMediaOffice) [July 7, 2021](#)

The extent of the damage caused by the explosion to the port and surrounding cargo was not immediately clear.

Footage shared on social media of the aftermath showed charred containers, ashes and littered debris. The sheer force and visibility of the blast suggested the presence of a highly combustible substance.

[Four years at sea, now just metres from shore: 'living hell' of stranded UAE ship](#)

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Dubai authorities told the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya TV that the crew had evacuated in time and that the fire appeared to have started in one of the containers holding “flammable material,” without elaborating.

Seeking to downplay the explosion, Mona al-Marri, director general of Dubai Media Office, told Al-Arabiya the incident “could happen anywhere in the world” and that authorities were investigating the cause.

Authorities did not identify the stricken ship beyond saying it was a small vessel with a capacity of 130 containers.

UPDATE - Dubai officials responding to fire caused by an explosion on a container ship at Jebel Ali Port.pic.twitter.com/r5orj9RxMx

— Disclose.tv □ (@disclosetv) [July 7, 2021](#)

Ship tracker MarineTraffic showed a fleet of small support vessels surrounding a docked container ship called the Ocean Trader flagged in

Comoros. Footage from the scene rebroadcast by the UAE's state-run WAM news agency showed firefighters hosing down a vessel bearing paint and logo that corresponds to the Ocean Trader, operated by the Dubai-based Inzu Ship Charter.

Jebel Ali is one of the largest ports in the world and the largest in the Middle East. It serves cargo from the Indian subcontinent, Africa and Asia. Operated by DP World, it has four sprawling container terminals that can berth some of the world's largest ships.

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Crime

Wayne Couzens pleads guilty to murdering Sarah Everard

Serving Met officer abducted 33-year-old from street in south London in March before killing her



Court artist sketch of Wayne Couzens, centre, during appearance at Westminster magistrates court in March. Photograph: Elizabeth Cook/PA

Court artist sketch of Wayne Couzens, centre, during appearance at Westminster magistrates court in March. Photograph: Elizabeth Cook/PA

Vikram Dodd Police and crime correspondent

Fri 9 Jul 2021 06.02 EDT

A serving police officer has admitted murdering Sarah Everard after abducting her from the street as she walked home in south London.

The Metropolitan police constable Wayne Couzens pleaded guilty at the Old Bailey on Friday to her murder, having admitted to her kidnap and rape [at an earlier hearing](#).

Everard, a 33-year-old marketing executive, disappeared on 3 March and her body was recovered from woodland near Ashford in Kent, about 20 miles west of Couzens's home, seven days later. It was hidden and wrapped in a builder's bag Couzens had bought days earlier. She was identified via her dental records.

Couzens was an armed officer in the Met's elite parliamentary and diplomatic protection group. The case triggered a debate about women's safety. The fact a rapist and murderer had hidden within the ranks of Britain's biggest force, and been entrusted with a gun to guard sensitive sites, shook the top of the Met.



Sarah Everard, who was killed aged 33. Photograph: PA

He appeared via video link from Belmarsh prison for the hearing.

Couzens was asked by the court clerk how he would plead to the count of murder. He replied: "Guilty."

The clerk asked: "You plead guilty to murder?"

"Yes," replied Couzens, his head barely lifting.

The hearing started with the court being told Couzens had already pleaded guilty to the kidnap and rape of Everard.

Couzens, 48, from Deal, in Kent, now faces a mandatory life sentence for the murder.

He finished work at 7am on the day he attacked Everard, then collected a rental car he had hired three days earlier. He drove around in the hire car, before he spotted Everard walking home after visiting a friend's home. Everard was reported missing by her partner the next day when she failed to meet him as they had arranged.

Couzens was arrested at his home in Deal on 9 March, first on suspicion of kidnap, and then the next day while in police custody he was arrested on suspicion of Everard's murder.

The results of a postmortem showed she had died from compression of the neck.

Everard's disappearance was initially treated by the Met as a missing persons case but as concerns mounted it was taken over by the specialist crime command unit.

Footage from a passing bus captured the white Vauxhall Astra used by Couzens and its number plate. When detectives traced the plate it led to a rental company in Dover, Kent. The company handed over the details of the person who had rented the car. Couzens had used two mobile phone numbers to hire it, one of which was a mobile number recorded on his Met police personnel file.

When arrested, Couzens admitted taking Everard but initially denied her murder.

In a bizarre story comprised of lies, he claimed he had kidnapped Everard and then as he was driving through Kent, pulled over when his vehicle was flashed by an eastern European gang. He claimed they were threatening him and his family after he had underpaid for a sex worker the gang controlled and met at a Folkestone hotel weeks earlier.

Couzens was vetted when he first became a police officer with the civil nuclear constabulary (CNC) in 2011. The Guardian understands he was at first vetted more than the average officer as he served for eight months at the high-security Sellafield site and was developed vetted, one of the highest levels of clearance.

He then transferred to serve in Dungeness, Kent, which did not require such a high level of vetting, and served there for the rest of his time in the CNC. The Met has refused so far to say whether Couzens was vetted again in 2018 when he joined Britain's biggest force.

Before joining the CNC Couzens volunteered with Kent police from 2005-09, becoming a special sergeant. He was also in the territorial army and worked at the family garage in Kent.

The kidnapping and murder of Everard triggered a national [debate about the safety of women](#) in the UK and whether the criminal justice system does enough to protect them and punish those who attack them.

Vigils held around the country passed off largely without incident, but one near to the route of Everard's last known journey, on Clapham Common in south London, resulted in the Met being widely criticised for [alleged heavy-handed tactics](#).

Despite the criticism, a report by the policing inspectorate not only cleared police of wrongdoing but praised them for their restraint.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) is investigating other matters raised by the case, including injuries Couzens sustained while in police custody after his arrest, believed to have been self-inflicted.

The IOPC also announced it would be examining the actions of an officer at a search cordon who was alleged to have shared an inappropriate graphic with colleagues via social media.

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Iran and Russia move to fill diplomatic vacuum in Afghanistan

Iranian foreign minister meets Taliban negotiators in Tehran, while Turkey offers troops to protect Kabul airport



Iran's Javad Zarif at a diplomacy forum in Turkey last month. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Iran's Javad Zarif at a diplomacy forum in Turkey last month. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor

Fri 9 Jul 2021 00.00 EDT

Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Russia have moved to fill the military and diplomatic vacuum opening up in [Afghanistan](#) as a result of the departure of US forces and military advances by the Taliban.

In Tehran the Iranian foreign minister, Javad Zarif, met [Taliban](#) negotiators to discuss their intentions towards the country, and secured a joint statement saying the [Taliban](#) do not support attacks on civilians, schools, mosques and hospitals and want a negotiated settlement on Afghanistan's future.

The Taliban side was led by Abbas Stanekzai, a senior negotiator and head of the group's political bureau in Qatar, while the Afghan government side was led by the former vice-president Yunus Qanooni.

Three other Afghan delegations were in Tehran at the same time. The value of the joint statement promising further talks is contestable, but Tehran's diplomatic activism underlined fears in [Iran](#) about a spillover created by a prolonged civil war on its long border.

Estimates suggest as many as 1 million Afghans will pour over the border to avoid the fighting or Taliban rule. Iranian social media showed Afghan forces deserting two of three customs offices along the border at Islam-Qata and Farah. With an estimated 700km of its border with Afghanistan now in Taliban hands, Iran does not have much choice but to take an active interest.

It is estimated that Iran already hosts 780,000 registered Afghan refugees and that between 2.1 and 2.5 million undocumented Afghans live in Iran.

Russia has sought assurances that the Taliban will not allow Afghanistan's northern borders to be used as a base for attacks on the former Soviet republics.

In a move designed in part to please the US but also to advance Ankara's self-interest, [Turkey](#) has conditionally offered Turkish troops for a Nato-overseen project to protect Kabul international airport. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has offered to provide Turkish troops in a possible unlikely alliance with Hungary.

Turkey has previously guarded the airport but it fears another wave of migration and may see a military role as a way back into the good books of Washington.

The Taliban delegation who visited Iran on Tuesday and Wednesday at Tehran's invitation, alongside three other Afghan delegations, were told by Zarif that they may have to take tough decisions. Courage in peace was more important than courage in war, he said, arguing that courage lay in sacrificing maximalist demands and listening to the other side.

Zarif also said a continuation of conflicts between the government and the Taliban would have "unfavourable" consequences for Afghanistan, and a return to the intra-Afghan negotiations was the "best solution". Iran has not attended the stalled [Doha negotiations](#) for over two years.

A lively debate is under way inside Iran on how to approach the Taliban. Some analysts argue mass migration from Afghanistan caused by a Taliban insurgency might help the Iranian economy, and that Iran should not oppose a Taliban takeover.

Saeed Laylaz, a prominent reformist-minded economist and adviser to previous governments, said: "Iran is facing a demographic crisis and I believe that the best, closest and least costly way to overcome this demographic crisis is to accept emigration from Afghanistan. Stability in Afghanistan is important for national security, contributing to the ageing crisis and Iran's economy.

"The Taliban could not have survived so long without genuine political support and they might now serve Iran's regional diplomatic interests. The Taliban are no longer the Taliban of the past, they have also realised that we must interact with the world, we must cooperate with the countries of the region."

The director general of the west Asia office at Iran's foreign ministry, Rasoul Mousavi, also sounded sympathetic if more reserved. "The Taliban are from the Afghan people," Mousavi said. "They are not separated from Afghanistan's traditional society, and they have always been part of it. Moreover, they have military power. The US has lost the war and can no longer carry out a military operation against the Taliban."

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Taliban

Taliban claim to hold 85% of Afghanistan after taking key border crossing

Militants capture Islam Qala on border with Iran amid sweeping offensive launched as US withdraws



Afghan border police guard the Islam Qala crossing into Iran in 2019. A government official said efforts were under way to recapture the site from the Taliban. Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

Afghan border police guard the Islam Qala crossing into Iran in 2019. A government official said efforts were under way to recapture the site from the Taliban. Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

Agence France-Presse in Kabul

Fri 9 Jul 2021 05.59 EDT

The Taliban have claimed to be in control of 85% of [Afghanistan](#), including a key border crossing with Iran, following a sweeping offensive launched as US troops pull out.

Hours after [Joe Biden issued a staunch defence of the US withdrawal](#), the Taliban said fighters had seized the border town of Islam Qala – completing an arc of territory from the Iranian border to China.

A delegation of [Taliban](#) officials in Moscow said the groups controlled 250 of Afghanistan's 398 districts, a claim impossible to independently verify and disputed by the government.

An Afghan government official said efforts were under way to recapture Islam Qala – the main conduit for trade between Afghanistan and Iran – as the insurgents continued to make sweeping gains across the country.

[Boris Johnson announces end of UK military mission in Afghanistan](#)

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“All Afghan security forces including the border units are present in the area, and efforts are under way to recapture the site,” said an interior ministry spokesperson, Tariq Arian.

Hours earlier, Biden said the US military mission would end on 31 August – nearly 20 years after it began – having “achieved” its goals.

But he admitted it was “highly unlikely” Kabul would be able to control the entire country.

“The status quo is not an option,” Biden said of staying in the country. “I will not send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan.”

With the Taliban having taken much of northern Afghanistan in recent weeks, the government is holding little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must be largely reinforced and resupplied by air.

The air force was under severe strain even before the Taliban’s lightning offensive overwhelmed the government’s northern and western positions, putting further pressure on the country’s limited aircraft and pilots.

Afghan commandos and the insurgents have clashed this week in a provincial capital for the first time, with thousands of people fleeing Qala-i-Naw in north-west Badghis province.

The Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani, said the government could handle the situation but that difficulties lay ahead. “What we are witnessing is one of the most complicated stages of the transition,” he said in a speech in Kabul. “Legitimacy is ours; God is with us.

“What we are witnessing is one of the most complicated stages of the transition.”

The Taliban have been emboldened by the troop withdrawal and with peace talks with the government deadlocked, appear to be pressing for a full military victory.

This week more than 1,000 Afghan troops fled into Tajikistan in the face of a Taliban onslaught.

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Taliban close in on Helmand capital as UK Afghan mission ends

Lashkar Gah still under control of government forces but local activist says city is under siege



Members of an anti-Taliban militia take position during fighting with Taliban insurgents on the outskirts of Lashkar Gah in Helmand province earlier this year. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

Members of an anti-Taliban militia take position during fighting with Taliban insurgents on the outskirts of Lashkar Gah in Helmand province earlier this year. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

[Emma Graham-Harrison in Kabul](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 12.51 EDT

As Boris Johnson [announced the end](#) of Britain's military mission in Afghanistan, Taliban fighters pressed in on the capital of Helmand province, once the centre of the UK's presence there.

Militants are less than a mile from Lashkar Gah, now also home to tens of thousands of people who have fled the fighting or [Taliban](#) rule across the rest of the province, local officials said.

“There is no security in Lashkar Gah, the situation is quite dangerous,” Majid Akhundzada, a member of the Helmand provincial council, told the Guardian. “All the districts have either fallen or the fight is ongoing. The government is in a weak, defensive position.”

Helmand has 14 districts, and only Lashkar Gah is still largely under control of government forces. Troops loyal to Kabul also hold the centres of four districts, Kajaki, Nad Ali, Marjah and Garmsir, and have isolated army bases in some areas including Sangin, but these have to be supplied by air transport.

Soldiers are trapped in these outposts, with the dead and wounded being transported too late, if at all, according to locals.

Mohammad Zaman Hamdard, a spokesperson for Helmand’s police chief, said government forces including commandos, backed by air support, were regaining ground. He said large numbers of young people who formed unofficial militias to protect the regional capital were supporting security forces.

[Graphic](#)

“The biggest problem is the numerous mines in the area that we are working to deactivate. Much work has been done. The air force has also been strengthened. The Taliban have suffered heavy casualties,” he said.

Many of those displaced from rural homes do not have decent shelter or enough to eat, said Abdul Haq Zwakman, a civil activist. “The city is under siege, hundreds of displaced families are living in hunger and starvation,” he said. “We never imagined we’d be in this situation. The Taliban’s success is

greater than ever, it's making rapid progress, they capture weapons and ammunition, have a large manpower force, and control a large geographic area.

"We are not far away from people starting big protests against both the government and Taliban, because neither side benefits the people. They only create problems for them and pursue their own goals."

Hundreds of British and American soldiers died fighting the Taliban in Helmand, a hub of opium production and insurgency. Since the foreign troops' departure in 2014, the militants have slowly consolidated control over many of its districts, including Sangin.

Haji Wali Mohammad, a tribal elder from Sangin, said at least half the population had fled to Lashkar Gah. A few hundred soldiers were clinging on to a base, he added.

"[Foreign] supporters left us with only a weak government, they failed to build a strong institutions, prevent corruption and enforce the law," he said. He called on the international community to support the peace process.

Zwakman, the activist, praised the work of British troops and the civilian provincial reconstruction team building roads and other infrastructure, but said they had left too soon.

"Without the help of the British and other foreign countries, we could not develop here. Unfortunately, these countries hastily decided to withdraw from [Afghanistan](#). Because we lacked security, the British troops should have remained to some extent."

Akhundzada warned that without help against the resurgent Taliban, Helmand could become a centre of extremism again, despite billions of dollars of aid and the loss of so many soldiers' lives.

Government forces trying to defend remote outposts are running out of food and ammunition. "How can they resist under these conditions?" he said. "The government has failed to carry out its plans and responsibilities.

“If no serious action is taken, another catastrophe would ensue across the country. The international forces that spent so much money here in Helmand would not be able to contain it.”

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Coronavirus

First year of pandemic claimed lives of 25 young people in England

Analysis, showing 4% of 5,830 children hospitalised in 12 months to February entered ICU wards, could inform vaccine policy



Children's drawings supporting the NHS near St Thomas' hospital, London, April 2020. Photograph: Barcroft Media/Barcroft Media via Getty Images

Children's drawings supporting the NHS near St Thomas' hospital, London, April 2020. Photograph: Barcroft Media/Barcroft Media via Getty Images

Linda Geddes and Ben Quinn

Fri 9 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

During the first year of the pandemic 25 children and teenagers died as a direct result of Covid-19 in England and about 6,000 were admitted to

hospital, according to the most complete analysis of national data on the age group to date.

Children seen to be at greatest risk of severe illness and death from coronavirus were in ethnic minority groups, and those with pre-existing medical conditions or severe disabilities.

The findings, which have not yet been peer reviewed, will be submitted to the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to help inform policies about who should be offered Covid-19 vaccines or continued to ask to shield.

"This is essentially the first complete national cohort of children and young people affected by Covid-19," said Prof Russell Viner, at University College London (UCL) [Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health](#), who contributed to the research.

Viner added that although children and young people were known to be at low risk of severe illness or death these findings were the first "to really and precisely, in a very large population, give us clear estimates of those risks" ..

Using data on hospital admissions covering children in England under a year old up to 17-year-olds, researchers led by Joseph Ward, a doctor at UCL calculated that 5,830 children and young people were admitted to hospital with Covid-19 during the first year of the pandemic, up to the end of February 2021.

Of these children 251 (4%) required intensive care, equivalent to a one in 50,000 chance of being admitted to ICU with Covid-19 for those under 18.

The researchers also identified 690 children and young people who had developed the rare Covid-related condition known as paediatric multisystem inflammatory syndrome (PIMS-TS), of whom 309 required intensive care – equating to a risk of one in 38,911.

Ward said: "Factors linked to a higher risk of severe Covid-19 appear to be broadly consistent for both children and adults. Our study found a higher risk of admission to intensive care among young people of black ethnicity

compared to white, as well as among young people with health conditions such as diabetes, asthma and cardiovascular disease. Young people with multiple conditions had the highest risk.”

Separately, researchers led by Clare Smith at the Bristol Royal Hospital for Children, reviewed all of the child deaths that occurred in England between March 2020 and February 2021, to calculate the number that could be directly attributed to Covid-19.

They found that 25 children and young people had died because of the coronavirus, equating to an absolute risk of one in 481,000, or approximately two in a million. Children and young people with complex neurodisability were at the highest risk of death.

Viner said: “These new studies show that the risks of severe illness or death from Sars-CoV-2 are extremely low in children and young people. [They] are important as they will inform shielding guidance for young people as well as decisions about the vaccination of teenagers and children, not just in the UK but internationally.

“My personal view is that it would be very reasonable to vaccinate a number of the groups that we’ve studied who don’t necessarily have a particularly high risk of death but their risk of having severe illness and coming into paediatric intensive care, while still low, is still higher than the general population.

“However, it is about having enough vaccinations and waiting for some of the safety data, which should increase rapidly over the next two to three weeks.”

The studies did not assess the risk of “long Covid” in under 18s. However, speaking at a separate online seminar organised by the Royal Society of Medicine, one of the country’s leading experts on the condition in children and young people warned that a “tidal wave” of long Covid infections among teens was on the way.

Esther Crawley, a professor of child health at the University of Bristol, said that some frontline doctors were in denial about long Covid in children.

“Parents and children are going to their GPs to try to seek help and being turned away.” She also said that her direct experience studying the condition had convinced her that children over the age of 12 should now be vaccinated.

The scale of the problem was also emphasised by Nathalie MacDermott, a doctor and clinical lecturer in paediatrics at King’s College London, who warned of shortages of paediatric resources to cope with it. “We are talking several thousand children, young people and young adults suffering ongoing symptoms. It could be detrimental to their education and, later on, to our economy, not least since we do not have enough paediatricians in this country to manage.”

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Lifting Covid rules in England ‘will overwhelm testing capacity’

Exclusive: Expert says 660,000 PCR tests a day will be needed if country has 100,000 daily infections

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A woman uses a swab at an NHS test and trace Covid-19 unit near London.
Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty Images

A woman uses a swab at an NHS test and trace Covid-19 unit near London.
Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty Images

[Robert Booth](#) Social affairs correspondent
Thu 8 Jul 2021 14.18 EDT

The £22bn NHS test-and-trace system risks being overwhelmed by surging Covid infections after the planned wholesale lifting of restrictions in [England](#) this month, a leading academic has warned.

Jon Deeks, a professor of biostatistics at the University of Birmingham, said at least 660,000 gold-standard PCR tests are likely to be needed each day to discover 100,000 daily infections this summer – the number [forewarned by the health secretary](#), Sajid Javid, after the government announced plans to drop restrictions from 19 July.

This level of testing is almost three times the [current rate](#) in the UK, more than double the highest volume achieved at any point during the pandemic, and at the peak of the [system's theoretical laboratory capacity](#) calculated this spring by the National Audit Office (NAO).

One director of public health warned that rationing may be required in the areas where contact tracing is carried out, focusing on poorer locations on the basis that residents are more likely to live in overcrowded conditions and have face-to-face jobs.

The latest data released by [NHS](#) test and trace on Thursday showed signs of the system already straining. Positive tests in England were up 71% in the last week of June – the highest number since early February – and turnaround times have increased, with the proportion of in-person test results returned in 24 hours down to 77% from 84% the previous week.

On Thursday, the UK had another 32,551 [reported](#) coronavirus cases and 35 deaths within 28 days of a positive test. It is the highest death toll since early April and the highest number of new infections since 20 January.

Ministers are now heaping further pressure on the test-and-trace system, which has a £22bn budget, by mandating that anyone who has close contact with an infected person from 16 August should take a PCR test “as soon as possible” instead of self-isolating.

“If we get to 100,000 cases a day, the capacity of our testing system is going to be breached, particularly when we build in the recommendation for testing contacts,” Deeks told the Guardian. “Plus some of the labs are being

shut down, such as the turnkey lab here at the University of Birmingham.” The Department of [Health](#) and Social Care (DHSC) said it has been consolidating its laboratory network.

Graphic

PCR testing capacity has been reduced by more than 100,000 tests per day since the end of March, according to the NAO, but it has increased 45% in the last four weeks.

On Thursday, Dr Jenny Harries, the chief executive of the UK Health and Security Agency, who is now in charge of NHS test and trace, told MPs that current laboratory capacity was “peaking”. She said the sharp rise in cases is also “overstretching” local contact tracing capacity.

She said private labs would now be used as “part of the planned step-up” in capacity to tackle the growing demand. A DHSC-owned “mega-lab” built at Leamington Spa has started operating, but will only reach capacity “in the coming months”.

Directors of public health have also warned the accelerating spread of the Delta coronavirus variant in recent weeks means their capacity to reach infected people and gather information about their contacts is close to its limit.

“I am struggling to think how [the system] can cope with 100,000 cases a day,” said Greg Fell, the director of public health for Sheffield city council, which contacts people who have tested positive to instruct them to isolate, gather contacts and offer support. “We have seen a massive increase in cases over recent days and that’s only going to go one way. We are getting close to capacity now.”

One director said local teams were “despondent” and added: “I don’t see how test and trace will cope with 100,000 cases a day, if I’m honest.”

Lorna Smith, Newcastle’s deputy director of public health, said: “The system could not cope with that number using a test and trace approach and a lack of other restrictions or guidance in place. That level of transmission

has serious implications for our health system ... [with] a significant proportion of unvaccinated adults that we still need to reach." Some [53% of adults in Newcastle](#) have still not had two doses.

Harries told MPs on Thursday that some councils have already hit contract tracing capacity and are handing cases over to the centralised system. But she said she anticipated new cases peaking in the middle of August when 75% of the population should be double jabbed.

Greg Clark, the Conservative chairman of the Commons science and technology committee, said: "Now we have surging infections ... a lot rests on test and trace in the future, and the record over the last year has not been one of reliable springing into life to wrestle this virus to the ground."

Deeks based his estimate of the required capacity on the testing needs at the peak of the pandemic in the second week of January, when [300,000 PCR tests were deployed each day](#) to find 45,000 cases. More recently the number of tests required to find a case has increased, meaning his estimate may be conservative.

Labour said it appeared the government had not learned from mistakes last autumn when people were sent hundreds of miles for tests "because of a failure to anticipate increased demand for tests".

"This coupled with the winding down of the contract tracing service earlier this year leaves us dangerously exposed at a time when the government seems hell bent on maximising the risk," said Justin Madders, a shadow health minister.

A DHSC spokesperson said: "We continuously review our laboratory requirements as the pandemic progresses. NHS test and trace continues to be a central part of our roadmap to return life to normal, and our new UK Health Security Agency will consolidate the enormous expertise that now exists across our health system to help us face down future threats and viruses."

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Covid travel: what are amber-list rules and quarantine in England?

If you have had two Covid-19 vaccinations in UK you will not have to quarantine on return from 19 July

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Corsica. More than 140 countries, including France, are on the amber list.
Photograph: Eric James/Alamy

Corsica. More than 140 countries, including France, are on the amber list.
Photograph: Eric James/Alamy

[Jessica Elgot](#)
[@jessicaelgot](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 11.26 EDT

Can I travel to an amber list country without quarantining on my return?

Yes, if you live in England and have had two Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the UK. The vaccines must have been given 14 days prior to travel. The [policy begins on 19 July](#). Authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have not said if they will follow suit.

Which countries are on the amber list?

More than 140 countries, including popular destinations such as Spain, Greece, Italy, France, Portugal and the US – although some will have tough restrictions on UK visitors. The full list can be [found here](#).

What about under-18s who have not been offered vaccination?

People aged under 18 will also be exempt from the requirement to isolate on return.

Do I still need to get tests?

Yes. People returning from holidays from amber destinations will be required to take a Covid-19 test three days before returning. They will also have to take a PCR test on or before the second day of their return, but will be exempted from the day-eight test.

Which vaccines are recognised?

The exemption to quarantine for holidaymakers returning from amber-list nations will only apply to those who have been vaccinated by the NHS – therefore those who have been vaccinated in different countries cannot use the exemption. The exemption must be proved by using the NHS app or the NHS Covid certificate which [you can request by dialling 119](#).

Will this mean UK citizens living abroad and others from amber-list countries won't be able to skip quarantine?

Yes, and this is likely to cause a significant backlash especially from Britons who live abroad and have been vaccinated in countries such as France, Spain or the US. Currently the UK is only accepting the NHS certification as proof of vaccination.

Those travelling to the UK from amber-list countries who have been vaccinated abroad will still have to quarantine at home or in the place they are staying for 10 days, taking a test on day two and eight.

Will the system discriminate against younger travellers who are single-jabbed?

Yes. Young people could lose out on summer holidays because of the eight-week gap between first and second doses, meaning many people in their 20s will not receive their second doses until September.

Can I go on holiday to an amber-list country?

Yes, the government will lift its advice not to travel to amber-list countries on 19 July.

What's the difference with a green-list country?

In essence, for fully vaccinated travellers the requirements for green and amber-list countries are the same. Travellers to green-list countries, which currently include a small number of destinations including the Balearics, do not have to quarantine on return, regardless of their vaccine status.

Are there still red-list countries?

Yes, and travellers will still have to go into hotel quarantine returning from those countries, which currently include Argentina, Bahrain, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Maldives, Turkey and Tunisia.

Amber, green or red list? Search by country

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Sturgeon warns against treating young people like Covid ‘guinea pigs’

Masks likely to remain in some settings such as shops or on public transport in Scotland

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Sturgeon said the desire to live free of restrictions does not mean governments can ‘throw all caution to the wind’. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/AFP/Getty Images

Sturgeon said the desire to live free of restrictions does not mean governments can ‘throw all caution to the wind’. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/AFP/Getty Images

[Libby Brooks](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 13.08 EDT

Nicola Sturgeon has warned against treating young people like “guinea pigs” by allowing them to get infected with coronavirus when lifting restrictions, amid fears they remain at risk of significant health impacts such as [long Covid](#).

Scotland’s first minister said the desire to live free of lockdown-style restrictions did not mean governments could “throw all caution to the wind”, while suggesting the “domination” of England’s plans to scrap Covid rules risked confusing other UK nations.

The steep rise in infections across Scotland caused by the Delta variant may be levelling off, Sturgeon added. The current spike has led to six Scottish health boards being placed among the [top 10 worst-hit regions in Europe](#) by the WHO last weekend.

The levelling off gave her “more cause for optimism” that she would be able to confirm the move to level 0 of Scotland’s five-tier system of Covid controls in parliament next Tuesday, she said, before emphasising that the planned easing on 19 July “won’t be an abrupt end to basic protective measures like face covering, physical distancing, rigorous hand hygiene and advising on good ventilation.”

[Scotland to remove all major Covid restrictions on 9 August](#)

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However, she pointed out the “significant” impact the virus can have on younger people, even if there is a lower risk of death. She said: “I want to set out simply why we can’t just throw all caution to the wind. Firstly, this virus is still dangerous, as we see every day. It is still taking lives, though mercifully, thanks to the vaccines, it is doing so in far fewer numbers than we saw in earlier stages.

“Secondly, even though the majority of cases are now in younger people, who are much less likely to become acutely ill, the health impacts can still be significant. Many young people are suffering from long Covid, which of course experts still do not fully understand. So, it would be wrong and irresponsible, because our young people are not guinea pigs, to have no concern at all for young people infected with this virus.”

In England, experts on long Covid have expressed concern over the government's policy of lifting virtually all remaining lockdown measures.

"I don't think we should be relaxing at all because I have seen first the impact of things on people and we really should be keeping the measures that we have for now," said Dr Victoria Miller, a consultant psychologist at Newcastle Universities.

Long Covid was placing a "huge strain" on sufferers' psychological wellbeing in a way that was much more complex than other diseases, she told an online seminar organised by the Royal Society of Medicine.

"Now we are seeing people who have been isolated for so long and who are getting it. Sometimes the backdrop to those cases is even harder ... we are talking about people who may have also lost one or both parents with it."

Others who spoke at the same event linked concerns about the lifting of lockdown measures to numbers of children and young people at risk of going on to develop long Covid.

Sturgeon also gave her clearest indication yet that it was "probable" that face masks would still be required in some settings such as shops or on public transport even after 9 August, when the Scottish government aims to remove remaining legal restrictions including social distancing indoors.

"I do want to be clear that I think the wearing of face coverings for a period longer is likely to be one of the things we have to do," she said.

Referring several times to the difficulty of differentiating Scotland's public health messaging from reports of England's "Freedom Day", Sturgeon emphasised that the UK government's decision to end all restrictions in the face of the Delta surge, which has been subject to heavy criticism from public health experts, was "an exception".

The Welsh government has similarly indicated caution around Johnson's "Freedom Day". A Welsh government spokesperson said: "Since the start of the pandemic we have taken a cautious, phased approach to reopening and have been led by the data that is presented to the cabinet by the chief

medical officer and our scientific advisers, and not driven by artificial dates.” The next review of Welsh regulations is expected next week.

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Period and historical films

Interview

Vanessa Kirby and Katherine Waterston's frontier romance: 'She let me be more full-bodied'

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



'I feel more in touch with our female ancestors than I ever have before' ...
Vanessa Kirby (*right*) with Katherine Waterston in *The World to Come*.
Photograph: Matt Holyoak

'I feel more in touch with our female ancestors than I ever have before' ...
Vanessa Kirby (*right*) with Katherine Waterston in *The World to Come*.
Photograph: Matt Holyoak

The north-eastern US is not the only uncharted territory explored in the pair's 19th-century period drama. They discuss becoming friends, learning how to act and sexism in showbiz

Fri 9 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

After [the release this year of Ammonite](#), with Kate Winslet and Saoirse Ronan as 19th-century fossil hunters who fall in love in inclement weather, Saturday Night Live ran a trailer featuring Carey Mulligan in a spoof version. A sombre voice heralded “two straight actresses who dare not to wear makeup” along with “Academy award-winning glance choreography … the world’s saddest flirting … and best supporting actress nominee the wind.” After promising that the stars would “round all the bases, like grazing fingers, washing carrots”, the voiceover announced: “Lesbian Period Drama. You get one a year. Make the most of it.”

Not this year you don’t. The World to Come depicts a same-sex relationship flowering in the harsh conditions of the US frontier in 1846, where timid Abigail (Katherine Waterston) and brash, flame-haired Tallie (Vanessa Kirby) drift away from their husbands (Casey Affleck and Christopher Abbott) and into each other’s arms. The glancing is plentiful, the flirting desperately sad, the wind howling as if vocalising the women’s anguish. There is finger-grazing, but no carrot-washing, although the sweethearts do get to pluck a chicken together.

“Badly!” Kirby points out when she joins Waterston and me for this interview at the Corinthia hotel in central London. The women, who became friends while making the film in 2019, are thrilled to see each other; in her excitement, Waterston dives into the minibar and grabs a snack before gasping at her audacity. “I’m acting like I’m on some big-budget press tour. It’s insane that I just did that.” Kirby chips in: “Let’s order the lobster!”

A gay old time ... Saturday Night Live’s parody of lesbian dramas.

Having arrived before her co-star, Waterston had ordered mint tea and coffee on Kirby’s behalf. “I didn’t know if you’d be needing a comedown or a pick-me-up, so I got your one of each,” she says, curling her legs beneath her in an armchair. Seated on the sofa opposite, Kirby tilts her head appreciatively. “You’re enough of a pick-me-up,” she says.

Both women live in London – Kirby was born and raised in the city, while Waterston was born there but raised in Connecticut – and have been meeting up whenever work and lockdown have allowed. Both have also been busy. Kirby, 33, who was Oscar-nominated this year for her performance as a

grieving mother in [Pieces of a Woman](#) but is best known as Princess Margaret in [The Crown](#), is shooting the next two instalments of Mission: Impossible back to back. Meanwhile, Waterston, the 41-year-old star of [Alien: Covenant](#) and [Inherent Vice](#), has been filming the third Fantastic Beasts movie.

It was while Waterston, the daughter of the actor Sam Waterston, was here from the US in 2018 to make the second one that she decided to stay. “Well, there was Trump back home. Although here, of course, there’s ...” Her expression is that of someone who sold her place in the frying pan to make a home in the fire.

I’m sure there are actors who could skip the cow-milking lessons and still do a good job, but I’m not one of them

Katherine Waterston

Waterston had admired Kirby from afar before they arrived in Romania to make *The World to Come*. What was she a fan of? “Her courage. That little thing,” she says. “A lot of people go small because they’re so afraid of striking the wrong note, but Vanessa doesn’t do that. She can’t bullshit.” Kirby is squirming, but Waterston stands her ground: “It’s what I think!”

“I always feel like the pantomime ham,” Kirby says. “Restraint has taken me such a long time to learn.” She well remembers the shock of going from the vast Olivier stage at the National Theatre in [Women Beware Women](#) in 2010 to her first TV appearance, opposite Ben Whishaw in [The Hour](#). “All that projecting reads so fake when there’s a camera in front of your nose. Then I went through a stage of doing nothing. One comment was: ‘She’s dead behind the eyes.’ That was the review.”

She has always been curious about other actors’ processes. When she was working with John Hurt on [the holy grail TV drama Labyrinth](#), he told her he didn’t believe in method acting. “He said: ‘The audience won’t know if you’re thinking about your Tesco shopping.’” But Kirby had already experienced what she now knows to be the giddy rush of fully immersive acting when she was a teenager at school, playing Gertrude in an all-female

production of Hamlet. Backstage, between scenes, she found herself thinking in character.

“I was having a panic attack about what I was going to tell Claudius,” she recalls. “And when I came off stage at the end, I was like: ‘Ohhh. *That* was acting.’ It’s not what happens on stage in a big booming voice; it’s that bit in the corridor.” Waterston has a suggestion. “That could be your old-lady autobiography,” she says. “Acting in the Corridor: Memories from Stage and Screen by Vanessa Kirby.” They collapse into giggles.



‘Working with Katherine was an education’ ... Kirby with Waterston in Venice in September for the city’s film festival. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

While Kirby has her own process, she is open to learning. “Working with Katherine was an education,” she says. Waterston groans – “Oh, please!” – before dropping to her hands and knees and crawling behind the armchair to hide. Kirby presses on: “She’s forensic and she doesn’t leave anything unturned. She has to know psychologically why she’s doing the slightest thing, whereas with certain bits I’ll just suspend my disbelief.” Confident that the praise is ebbing, Waterston returns to her seat. “I suppose it’s greed, in a way,” she says. “I don’t want to miss anything that could be part of telling the story.”

Immersion in *The World to Come* was helped by the location: cast and crew were holed up together in a no-frills mountain lodge. “It was the middle of nowhere,” Kirby recalls. “No cars, just horses and carts. We were shooting in a valley we had to hike to. It helps so much. It’s almost impossible otherwise to truly experience a world without … *this*.” She picks up her phone, brandishing it like a dirty sock.

She was spared too much hard labour – “I was quite relieved when I read the script and saw I didn’t have any chores,” she says – whereas Waterston tills, hoes and milks her way through much of the film. Had the scene in which she administers to her husband an enema of molasses, warm water and lard not taken place off-screen, you can bet she would have rolled up her sleeves and got stuck in.

About the milking, she seems especially proud. “I did even more than you see on screen,” she says, eagerly. “Certain shots, I was disappointed that it’s only my hands. I was, like: ‘Will the audience know they’re *my* hands?’ I’m sure there are actors out there who could skip the milking lessons and still do a good job, but I’m not one of them. All we’re doing is trying not to suck, right?”

The sexual frontier ... watch the trailer for *The World to Come*.

Their performances are bone-deep and fine-grained, but they weren’t arrived at in a vacuum. Waterston’s acting choices as Abigail, who describes herself in the film as “a pot-bound root”, helped shape Kirby’s own decisions about how to bring Tallie to life. “Being in front of Katherine informed what I did,” she says. “Early on, I thought: ‘Oh, OK. To make this happen, I’ll have to be even more front-footed than I thought, because she’s *really* not going to come towards me. And this could go on for months!’ I knew she wouldn’t kiss me unless my attitude was: ‘I’m coming for you.’” She looks straight at her co-star. “You gave me permission to be more full-bodied.”

The traffic flowed both ways. “What I got from Vanessa when she looked at me was that she saw something in Abigail,” says Waterston. “Some place that existed beyond the pot-bound root. Tallie sees the extent of the person within. That’s a wonderful articulation of what it really is to love someone. There’s something so romantic about it.”

Kirby goes so far as to say that the film has changed her. “Making it has been quite profound for me, because I feel more in touch with our female ancestors than I ever have before. Women were literally owned by the men whose land they happened to be on. Think of all those lost voices. For me, the film’s title refers to the world that we’ve inherited from those women who didn’t have the freedom we have.”

Being in front of her informed what I did ... I knew she wouldn't kiss me unless my attitude was: 'I'm coming for you'

Vanessa Kirby

There is greater sensitivity now about the way women are not only photographed but written about. Lola Kirke took the New Yorker critic Anthony Lane publicly to task in 2018 [for describing her clothes in the film Gemini as “unflattering”](#), while a storm broke out recently when Carey Mulligan [challenged the language used about her in a Variety review](#) of Promising Young Woman.

Waterston doesn't read her own press: "When I descend into hell, it will probably be papered with interviews I've done," she says. But she has picked up on these tremors. "There was a certain type of profile, usually in Vanity Fair, that I used to love making fun of. They don't happen much now: 'She walks into the room ... gamine-like arms, faun-like expression ... her hair seems to be hovering a few inches above her shoulder ... there's a smell, yes, a smell like summer rain and ponies ...' And this is a grown woman they're talking about!"

For Kirby, some of the worst offenders have been screenwriters. "Whenever I auditioned for anything, I'd make a note of the descriptions. With female characters, it was always about their appearance. The man would be 'intelligent, confident'. The woman was 'blond, every man watches her'." Waterston agrees: "There were always two categories: 'We see her and we want to sleep with her,' or: 'We see her and we don't.'"

The auditions could be even worse. "I would go along dressed the way I thought the character would dress," says Waterston. "And then they'd say: 'If you want the part, come back in a half-length skirt.'

“I was thinking about this when we did *The World to Come*, because I was trying to understand what it meant to be a pot-bound root who has all this life within. I was thinking back to my early days in showbusiness and what it was to feel like I had this unidentifiable something that I wanted to give, to share, and there just being no playground for that stuff. There was a playground, sure, but it had different rules, a whole different game, even. What makes you pot-bound is when you’re in any situation where you can’t let your roots spread out.”

Having said that, she seems full of hope. “I think of the young women today who might previously have been in my position – kind of smart, just wanting to play interesting roles rather than wearing the short skirt and humiliating themselves for 10 years and then *maybe* getting the second supporting role. It’s so exciting to see what they will get to have, the ones who can now start with the wind at their backs like that.” She glances at Kirby with a gleam in her eye. “We might really be looking at a kick-ass generation.”

The World to Come is released on 23 July

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Interview

Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis: ‘Janet Jackson was fearless – she could do it all’

[Alexis Petridis](#)



Jimmy Jam, left, and Terry Lewis, near their studio in Agoura Hills, LA.
Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

Jimmy Jam, left, and Terry Lewis, near their studio in Agoura Hills, LA.
Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

The duo started their debut album 36 years ago, but work for the Jackson siblings, Mariah Carey and others got in the way. Now it's finally complete, R&B's great studio psychologists look back at an unmatched career



Fri 9 Jul 2021 08.29 EDT

Some albums take a long time to make, but few have had the gestation period of Jam & Lewis: Volume One. The production duo started work on their debut artist album 36 years ago, just as their career was taking off on the back of the SOS Band's hit single [Just Be Good to Me](#), but they were thrown off-course working for a minor figure with a couple of flop albums to her name: [Janet Jackson](#).

Together they started shaping what would become her 10m-selling 1986 breakthrough Control, which understandably “kind of stopped the progress on our own album”, as Jimmy “Jam” Harris, 62, puts it today, when he and his partner, Terry Lewis, 64, appear on a video call from their homes in Los Angeles. With Control ready to be delivered, they wrote a song for themselves that sounded the perfect calling-card for a Jam & Lewis album. “We thought we were done with Control, then Janet’s manager came to hear the album,” says Harris. “We played him Nasty, When I Think Of You, The Pleasure Principle … And he says: ‘I just need one more song, for Janet.’ I’m going: ‘No, man, no.’ We get in the car to go to a restaurant, Terry puts a cassette in, and about the third song in, Janet’s manager says: ‘That’s the song I need.’”

It was, inevitably, the song Harris and Lewis had earmarked for their own release, What Have You Done For Me Lately? “So it started her career, and ended ours, at least as artists,” sighs Harris. “That same scenario happened a lot. We would work with somebody, then we’d say: ‘Hey, want to do something for our album?’ They’d say: ‘Great.’ Then when the song was done, they’d go: ‘No, that’s too good, we’ve got to keep that.’”

Harris says they “finally got selfish” and embarked on their own album – which arrives with a star-studded guest list including Mary J Blige, Mariah Carey, the Roots and Usher – three years ago, after trying to work out what they “still had to do on our bucket list, or our fuck-it list, as Terry likes to call it: fuck it, let’s do it”.



Jam & Lewis in their studio. Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

What they might have left to do is not an unreasonable question for the pair to ask themselves. It’s hard to quantify how many records they have sold as producers and songwriters: quite aside from their association with Janet Jackson, which yielded nine US No 1s, they have worked with her brother Michael, TLC, Kanye West, Spice Girls, Rod Stewart, George Michael, Bryan Adams, Luther Vandross and Gwen Stefani, among a host of others. They have also achieved industry plaudits: Harris was the first African American ever to chair the Recording Academy, the organisation behind the

Grammy awards. They are, Harris says, “at a nice point in our careers where we have nothing to prove, but a lot to say”.

They first met at school in early 70s Minneapolis. Harris says it was “love at first sight ... I was an only child and I saw my big brother”. Lewis was impressed by the audience Harris attracted with his keyboard playing, “a group of three girls around him at the piano – he was *serenading* them”. They eventually started playing together in Flyte Time, a fixture on the city’s ferociously ambitious music scene. “We grew up in a competitive environment but also in an environment of racism, where we couldn’t play in the best clubs,” says Harris. “So we not only had to learn our instruments, but we also had to figure out how to get our talent out there. We became entrepreneurs and would rent ballrooms from hotels that were going to be torn down and pack them full of people. Then the other clubs would all be sitting empty: ‘Where’s everyone at tonight?’ ‘Oh, they’re watching the black band you wouldn’t hire.’”

They were already aware of the city’s rising star, Prince – he would come to their school in order to use its music room, dazzling all present with his ability to play any instrument – before he essentially took over Flyte Time, installing his friend Morris Day as lead vocalist, renaming them the Time and getting them a record deal. Harris and Lewis enjoyed what you might call a mercurial relationship with their new mentor. On the one hand, they were amazed and inspired by his talent and work ethic. “He would come rehearse with the Time for four or five hours, then go rehearse with the Revolution for four or five hours, *then* go to the studio all night,” marvels Harris. “The next day, he’d walk into our rehearsal, put a cassette in and, like, 1999 would come out. ‘Oh, I did it last night.’ It’s like: ‘Oh my God, this is crazy.’”



‘I never had any problem with him being the boss, because he earned that right’ ... Terry Lewis, left, with Jimmy Jam. Photograph: Philip Cheung/The Guardian

On the other, Prince was controlling: he wrote all the Time’s songs, and played all the instruments on their first two albums. “I never had any problem with him being the boss, because he earned that right,” says Lewis. “He had better ideas than any of us at that time. The problem only came when he didn’t want us to share our ideas ... we felt like we were subject to an indefinite kind of sidelining, so we just started doing things ... we needed to find outlets and when we did find outlets, it was torn down and we were told we couldn’t do that. I think his biggest fear was that we’d learn too much from being in his presence and then share that with the world in a way that he didn’t want us to.”

They began “moonlighting or nightlighting or whatever you want to call it” as producers and songwriters – the pop-minded Harris providing the melodies, George Clinton fan Lewis coming up with “the funky bottom”. It was a development that Lewis says made Prince “just livid”: after they missed a Time gig, caught in a blizzard en route from a recording session with the SOS Band, he fired them. But by then, they had started having hits: with the SOS Band, Klymaxx and another Minneapolis native, Alexander O’Neal.

Then came Janet Jackson. They worked with her despite her career having stalled, Harris says, because they remembered her appearing on variety shows, “the Cher show or whatever, always with this feisty attitude thing”, and thought her music to date hadn’t reflected that. They moved her from LA to Minneapolis, “somewhere she knew she was going to be an artist, not an artist/actress”, threw their wildest production ideas at her: clanking, almost industrial rhythms, dramatic synth stabs and samples. “She was fearless, she would try anything,” says Harris. “It was literally like a blank canvas and we could throw any paint – we could put watercolours, we could do oil, we could do abstract, fine art, we could do anything and she could do it all.”



Alexander O’Neal during a recording session with Jam & Lewis in Minneapolis in 1988. Photograph: Jim Steinfeldt/Getty Images

The results were startling, and defined a certain kind of futuristic 80s funk. Almost uniquely in the anonymous world of producers, they also developed a visual identity – I’m faintly disappointed that the two figures on my laptop screen aren’t dressed in the regulation Jam & Lewis uniform of matching suits, ties, shades and pork-pie hats – and turned out to be spectacularly adept at what Lewis calls the “overwhelming” business of production. It’s not just the music you have to worry about, he says, you have to be good at “psychology-slash-psychiatry” as well. They proved as capable of turning

around the fortunes of an ailing British synth pop band (the Human League's US No 1 Human) as they were of tailoring material to soul legends: Barry White, Earth, Wind & Fire, Aretha Franklin. "It's more of a fanship that we have with the artists than anything – that relationship comes first," says Lewis. "We try to navigate back to that position and say: OK, this is the kind of record as a fan I would love to hear you perform. We don't really have any consideration of where other music is today, or analytics and all that stuff people go through."

Among those whose ears pricked up was Michael Jackson, who apparently had a particular fondness for the hardest tracks the duo had devised for his sister – Nasty, Rhythm Nation, The Knowledge – and called upon the duo's services. "He loved superhero music, as I call it," says Lewis, "music that's splashing and dashing and just like, industrial."

When he turned up to record the ensuing single Scream, it was, says Harris, "the most impactful moment we've ever had in the studio", despite the fact Jackson initially seemed to be doing everything wrong. "He's dancing around, stomping, wearing clothes that jangled, all the things you're not supposed to do in a recording studio. And we were like little girls: 'Aaaah! It's Michael Jackson!'" But Jackson delivered a brutally funky performance. "He does his take, kills it, and says: 'How was that?' We're like: 'Y-y-yeah, Mike, that's good!' Janet was supposed to do her take right after Michael got done. She just leans in and says: 'I'll do my vocal in Minneapolis.' She wanted no part of following Michael – *that's* how crazy it was."

In the wake of their debut artist album, there is talk of a Jam & Lewis tour, an intriguing prospect. They haven't played live since they left the Time, but as anyone who has watched an old YouTube video of the Time knows, they were quite the performers: Prince made sure their shows were as tightly drilled and choreographed as his own gigs. "I always thought I was better suited behind the scenes," says Harris. "If I'm looking at me onstage, I'm thinking: I'd rather be looking at someone else. It gives me a bigger thrill to see New Edition or Boyz II Men, or Mary J Blige or Mariah singing our songs than to actually be on stage. But that being said, the chance to be on stage with Terry is very enticing. We realise, as we get older – or rather, as we age like fine wine – that there's fewer first times that we're going to be

able to experience in our life. We kind of have to remind people that this is new experience for us. It doesn't mean that we're not producers – we're not giving up anything else. But those first times, we really appreciate those.”

Jam & Lewis: Volume One is released 9 July on Flyte Tyme Records/BMG

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My summer of loveRelationships

My summer of love: ‘I’m in search of the perfect fleeting encounter’

Who needs for ever? I want a summer of beautiful vignettes. As a friend told me, the length of a relationship needn’t reflect its significance



‘Why wouldn’t you want to experience more brilliant moments?’ ... Annie Lord. Composite: Annie Lord/Getty

‘Why wouldn’t you want to experience more brilliant moments?’ ... Annie Lord. Composite: Annie Lord/Getty

Annie Lord

Fri 9 Jul 2021 05.30 EDT

A friend of mine told me about this guy she met in the queue at Tesco Metro. They both lunged for the same meatball wrap, and he said: “This is like the part in the film where we fall in love,” which didn’t happen but they did go to the pub and then to a nightclub, where they stood so close to the speakers they could feel the sound in the air as if it were wind. When the

lights came on, they headed back to his flat and had great sex, watched by a Simon Cowell cutout he had left over from a party. After climbing out of a window on to the roof of his flat, she stayed until the sky turned from flamingo pink to lilac, to dark blue, and it was time for her to go home and get some sleep.

“I was going to ask for his number but it was so perfect, I told him, ‘If it’s meant to be, I’ll see you out again.’”

“And did you?” I asked.

“Yeah, he tapped me on the shoulder at a festival a few months later but I had a boyfriend by then, so I ignored him. It was better to leave it at that anyway. Just one perfect night.”

I found my friend’s story deeply frustrating. Why wouldn’t you want to experience more brilliant moments, instead of stewing over the memory of just one? The pandemic only exacerbated this tendency. So little happened that when something did, it felt as though it had to really mean something. Each relationship was strung out and unpacked and reassessed until there was nothing left. There was a guy who regularly sexted me, and I asked him out so many times that his messages stopped. I wondered if me and my ex should give it one more shot, just to be sure. I wondered if my work husband should become my actual husband.

But summer is coming – I can hear it in the music playing out of rolled-down car windows; I can feel it in my thighs, as sweat makes the skin there catch and rub until it’s red raw – and I’m starting to feel very differently about my friend’s story of a perfect one-night stand. Having spent so much of the past year thinking in terms of the future, or dwelling on the past, I want to be – and sorry to sound like someone who writes inspirational statuses on LinkedIn – in the moment. I want to let men leave as freely as I let them arrive, instead of persuading them to stay until we become boring and repetitive; until they know I have to whistle to myself in order to piss; until I know they turn their socks inside out to get another wear out of them. I want a summer of beautiful vignettes. I don’t need to feel disappointed that the guy looking at me over his laptop in my local coffee shop didn’t ask me out, because the butterflies it gave me were enough. I don’t need to try to see

that Hinge match again, because the funny anecdote about his mum catching me tiptoeing towards the bathroom was enough.

“The length of a relationship doesn’t dictate its significance,” said my friend of her one-off encounter with the Tesco Metro man. It made me think about someone I kissed at Notting Hill carnival back in 2019. He danced up to me and spun me around. We didn’t really speak because we couldn’t hear each other over the music, and I didn’t really know what he looked like because he had huge sunglasses on. But I fancied him. I remember the slight wetness on his top lip, and the feeling of his hand on my hip. I remember thinking: *I don’t think you understand how much this means to me right now*.

After a while, he danced away on the current of the crowd he washed in on. I spent the rest of the day looking over my friend’s shoulder, trying to find him again. I wanted to get his number, go for a drink and find out what he does for work. Of course, I never did. Now I like to think that if that same man danced up to me again, I wouldn’t try to find him afterwards. Instead, I would just let him go, knowing he’ll mean more to me that way than if he stayed.

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My summer of love Relationships

My summer of love: ‘Every time he kissed another girl, my heart broke’

One hot teenage summer, I made a lifelong friend. Years later, it turned out there was much more between us



‘Instantly, I felt my heart skip a beat’ ... Hugo and Laura Dockrill.
Composite: Laura Dockrill/Getty

‘Instantly, I felt my heart skip a beat’ ... Hugo and Laura Dockrill.
Composite: Laura Dockrill/Getty

Laura Dockrill

Fri 9 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

It was the summer of 2000 when I fell in love. I would love to say it was hot, but it was probably raining; weather doesn’t bother you when you’re 14 and smitten. My baggy jeans were drenched in south London gutter scum, with knee-high puddle water stains and my try-hard skater shoes that had never once touched a skateboard, ugly as hell and a size too big.

It was the school holidays and a group of us had been kicked out of a daytime house party by an angry briefcase-swinging dad who had returned home early from work to find 30 drunk teenagers in his really nice house. And now we were party-less, location-less, desperately searching for a place to carry on.

We hadn't meant to knock on the door of a boy I shall leave unnamed (because he was an afterthought and I don't want to hurt his feelings) but inside his house was Hugo White, also aged 14, sitting on the stairs, innocently, with a massive smile, big blue eyes and rosy dimpled cheeks, his feet in bobbly socks. Instantly, I felt my heart skip a beat.

Those days were spent on a giant trampoline in our friend's garden while an old, overprotective, blond labrador padded around us. Failing that, we would spread out in giant crop circles on the common, spotlit by the sun and then the street lamps, and the reds and silvers of the night drivers. Sharing purple bottles of cider and beer, sharing rain-soggy cigarettes, smiles, phone numbers, jokes, stories and kisses – sadly never mine – singing our growing pains out to the swollen moon.

Hugo and I began writing letters and making mix tapes for each other. We talked on the phone most nights, his landline number tattooed on my brain. Our homes were opposites: mine chaotic and restless, his manicured and restrained. We lived in each other's pockets. We could, because we were "just friends". But I would be lying if I said that every time he kissed a girl I couldn't hear my heart break. I felt like I decomposed into water, the way [Amélie does in the cafe scene](#), more than once.

But, regardless, I had made a lifelong friend. When my parents split up, Hugo bought me a strawberry Ribena from the newsagent. When Mum married my now stepdad, Hugo was at the ceremony to grip my hand. Hugo bundled me into a cab when I got mugged (there was nothing in my rucksack except for an old, matted, unused tampon with a salt and vinegar crisp attached to it – the real theft was of my dignity). Hugo sat in a pink bathroom with me when I was throwing up and I, in turn, apologised to strangers on the night bus home as Hugo's vomit pebble-dashed their shoes. When we were 16 and Hugo's mum died, I stood by his side at the funeral.

Out of my depth. Not knowing what to do with his pain, his grief, his grace, his beauty. This love.

As the years rolled on, we would live to see many summers play out. Hugo would ride on his BMX and I would loyally ogle him from the sidelines, eating pic'n'mix, our fingers occasionally, secretly, touching on the night bus or under a table, sharing a can of fizzy drink. We slept in the same bed and never kissed – not even once. We would hold hands in the dark, talking about nothing and everything. When I think about how we looked back then, I see us as inseparable; twins, Geminis, back-to-back, like the Kappa logo.

It *almost* did happen back then, but no, it never did. Life continued on and we went our separate ways – but I would always wonder, did those summers ever mean the same to Hugo as they did to me? Five years ago, our paths crossed again – we were caught in two separate whirlwinds that seemed to spin together – and after an awkward coffee, and then a beer, I finally plucked up the courage to ask him. “Yes,” he said. “Of course they did.”

I write this on our first holiday as a married couple. We are in the countryside, our first escape from London since the pandemic. We've had endless, beautiful days of clear blue skies and heat on our skin, the blissful snores from our satisfied, sun-kissed three-year-old son between us. I've always wondered how I would tell our little boy about Hugo and me, and how it all started. I guess now I could just show him this.

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Euro 2020

‘If we win, you’ll be sad’: London’s Little Italy torn over Euro 2020 final



Antonio Verruto, the owner of Malletti's Pizza in Clerkenwell: 'Of course I want Italy to win, but I've been living in England for nearly 40 years – it's my second country.' Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Antonio Verruto, the owner of Malletti's Pizza in Clerkenwell: 'Of course I want Italy to win, but I've been living in England for nearly 40 years – it's my second country.' Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

England showdown fuels mixed emotions for Italians who call Clerkenwell neighbourhood home



[Matthew Weaver](#)

Fri 9 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

The prospect of Sunday's [Euro 2020](#) final between England and Italy is a "tragic situation", according to a priest at the Italian church in London. With a pained expression, he says: "I'm Italian, but I live in England and love English people, but now you have become our foes."

The priest is so troubled by the upcoming game that he refuses to give his name. Speaking after giving a mass at St Peter's church, in the heart of Little Italy in Clerkenwell, he adds: "England is the only team we don't want to

face. If we win, you'll be sad and I don't want the English people to be sad. If you win, I'll be sad and you can't console me."

Lots of Italians in Little [Italy](#) are similarly torn. Giovanna Gualti watched Wednesday night's semi-final rooting for Denmark. "I just didn't want England and [Italy](#) to be in the final," she says, sitting behind a desk at the Holborn School of Motoring, a family business that was established in 1965 as the Italian School of Motoring and is still decorated in the green, white and red of the Italian flag.

"If England win it will be just be yap, yap, yap," she says while miming a mouth opening and closing with her hand. "The English take it too seriously. If Italy win I'll be happy and I'll wear my Italian top for a couple of days, but I won't be bragging about it."

Gualti adds: "This is one of the best Italian teams we've had for a long time." But still she expects the [Azzurri](#) to lose. "England are at home and they'll have so many fans. It will give them the motivation to win."

Gualti grew up in Little Italy in the 1980s and spent every Saturday as a teenager in the Italian club above the church. "Now it's just a place for old people to play cards," she says.



Italian flags on display at the deli and cafe Terroni of Clerkenwell, where Euro 2020 has been good for business. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Like many of her childhood friends she moved out of the area after leaving home. She will be watching the game with her husband and two teenage children at home in Camden. “I’ve said to them if we lose there’ll be no dinner on Sunday evening.”

Next door to the motoring school, Antonio Verruto, the owner of Malletti’s Pizza, is more confident about Italy’s chances because of their togetherness as a team.

“We are lucky because we don’t have any prima donnas in the team now,” he says. “We just have 11 good, efficient soldiers who are ready to run and fight. It has been a revelation for Italy to play like that without any fear. They still dive, but that is in our DNA. We just can’t help it.”

He adds: “Of course I want Italy to win, but I’ve been living in England for nearly 40 years – it’s my second country. I’ll be annoyed if Italy lose and maybe my English friends will take the pee out of me, but that’s fine, I’ll do the same if Italy wins.

“Football is like an exhaust valve for releasing all the stress and anxiety. And it is exciting to have that after being restricted for 18 months in the horrible situation of fear of getting the disease, the fear of dying and the fear of losing jobs and businesses.”

He describes his own restaurant as “running on fumes” and adds: “It is still as dead as a dodo until people come back to work.”



An Italian supporter celebrates Italy's victory over Spain at the fan zone in Potters Field in London. Photograph: Thanassis Stavrakis/AP

But the football has been good for business at the Italian deli and cafe Terroni of Clerkenwell a few doors down. About 100 people watched Italy's semi-final win on Tuesday on the deli's TV, according to the co-owner Zin Sula, 48. "People love watching football with some pasta or pizza and a beer," he says. "We were a bit lucky in the semi, but let's see how lucky we are going to be on Sunday."

Sula is coming under pressure from customers to open up on Sunday evening for the game. "If I can get a replacement pizza chef, I'll open," he says. If not, he will be watching at home in Golders Green with his England-supporting sons.

[Football's coming to Rome? Italy fans look to Wembley showdown](#)
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The family of Les Giovanni, 62, will also have split allegiances on Sunday.

Giovanni was baptised in the Italian church and remembers being "spoiled" by his Italian grandmother's cooking. "Both my nans came here in 1920s – one from Sicily, the other from Naples. And they made their lives here."

Giovanni now lives in Mill Hill, but he was taking the opportunity to visit the church again and his childhood haunts while on a break from work repairing a nearby council flat. “It’s changed so much; no doors were locked back then.”

Despite his Italian roots, Giovanni will be supporting England on Sunday.

“I’ll be getting lots of grief from the rest of the family if Italy win. It’s already been going off on text and WhatsApp with the banter. I always get stick for supporting England.”

But Giovanni will be happy whatever the outcome – at the start of the tournament he placed a bet on Italy to win “with good odds”.

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Euro 2020

Football's coming to Rome? Italy fans look to Wembley showdown

Italians are excited for the Euro 2020 final against England: ‘If we play with the heart, we will win’



Italy fans before the Euro 2020 semi-final match between Italy and Spain in London on 6 July. Photograph: Carl Recine/AFP/Getty Images

Italy fans before the Euro 2020 semi-final match between Italy and Spain in London on 6 July. Photograph: Carl Recine/AFP/Getty Images

[Lorenzo Tondo in Palermo](#)

[@lorenzo_tondo](#)

Thu 8 Jul 2021 13.53 EDT

Tens of thousands of English football fans at Wembley tried to send a message to Italy on Wednesday night: Sunday's [Euro 2020](#) final will be hell for the *Azzurri*. Italians heard the deafening cheers of the home support loud and clear, but that chant, "It's coming home", screamed at the top of English lungs does not seem to have affected them greatly. They are far from intimidated.

"It's coming home? Maybe the English fans meant 'it's coming to Rome,'" said Giovanni Mapelli, 14, from Monticello Brianza, near Milan, who plays for a local football team. Since [England](#) won a place in the final, he and his brother have been mocking his England-born-and-raised mother.

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Thank you for your feedback.

Squares and streets across the country are filled with the red, white and green of the Italian flag, hanging over balconies or carried on the shoulders of people riding scooters – a level of enthusiasm not seen in [Italy](#) since the 2006 World Cup, which any Italian fan can tell you was won by the Azzurri.

The Italian press have not missed the opportunity to fan national pride. [La Repubblica](#) chose to remind its readers of Italy's track record: "In the 111-year history of Italy's national team, the final at Wembley will be the 12th, if we include the 1936 Olympics and the 1968 double final," it wrote. "Such a long experience certainly has a privilege: the possibility of not repeating any mistakes of the past." The comparison with England did not have to be spelled out.



A flag at the Rome fan zone in Vai dei Fori Imperiali. Photograph: Ernesto Ruscio/UEFA/Getty Images

La Gazzetta dello Sport, the country's main sports newspaper, took a different tack and in a long article – [later removed from its website](#) without explanation – raised the unsubstantiated suspicion that Uefa is backing England for the final to please Boris Johnson after his opposition to the Super League project. It suggested, in claims reported on by others in the Italian press, that the penalty awarded to England against Denmark before their winning goal was a sign of Uefa's support.

“Too bad,” it added. “Because England’s national team doesn’t need any help.”

What is certain is that despite the confidence shown by the fans and players, the Italians know Sunday’s match will not be a walk in the park. “It will be a real battle,” said Angelo Marolla, an athletic trainer for a volleyball team in Teramo and a huge fan of the Azzurri. “If we play with the heart, we will win. My dream is to relive Gianfranco Zola’s goal at Wembley against England in 1997.”

At Wembley on Sunday will be the president, Sergio Mattarella, who if Italy win would follow in the footsteps of his predecessors Sandro Pertini and

Giorgio Napolitano, who attended the Azzurri's World Cup final victories in 1982 and 2006. If Italy lose, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, who was present for Italy's defeat by France in the final of Euro 2000, will be the closest comparison.

[1,000 Italy fans to be allowed in to UK for Euro 2020 final at Wembley](#)

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According to Corriere della Sera's estimates, there will be one Italian for every four English fans at the final. "Wembley will be like this on Sunday evening," it said: "A white tide with a large blue band."

Meanwhile, the match between England and Italy has already started on social media, with fans from both countries ribbing each other.

Among the most popular tweets in Italy are those of Italian fans objecting to the adoption by English fans of the melody of the White Stripes' Seven Nation Army as a terrace chant. The same song had also been a [soundtrack of the Italians](#) after the victory at the 2006 World Cup.

"England on Wednesday stole two things," [wrote one](#). "Our choir and the victory against Denmark."

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The NHS bill is political dynamite – and a gift to Labour

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Even the new health secretary, Sajid Javid, seems nervous about the extent of this government power grab



NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens speaks at a service at St Paul's cathedral, London, on 5 July to mark the 73rd birthday of the NHS.
Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens speaks at a service at St Paul's cathedral, London, on 5 July to mark the 73rd birthday of the NHS.
Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Fri 9 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

It's no surprise that [the new health secretary has balked](#) at a gigantic new reorganisation bill before he had even got his feet under the NHS operating table. [Five million people](#) waiting for treatment, a workforce crisis and another Covid-19 tide already cancelling treatments is trouble enough. Sajid Javid's anxiety is shared by many, Theresa May just one of those warning of the bill's perils. But No 10 blasted [ahead with the bill](#) this week, impervious to this political dynamite.

Whatever their merits or follies, all new re-disorganisations are risky for Tory governments, who are never trusted with the NHS. How easy it is for Labour, backed by influential NHS figures, to arouse public suspicion of Tory intentions. Even Margaret Thatcher had to back off from her radical privatising impulse, to swear between gritted teeth that the NHS was "safe in my hands". Voters might ignore the fiendishly complex history of NHS

restructuring, but they will grasp one simple, sinister point: the government is seizing control of the everyday running of the NHS, in what [the Health Service Journal calls](#) “an audacious power grab”. Any local decision can fall under populist political whim from the top.

Tory MPs should recall how Andrew Lansley’s disastrous 2012 [Health](#) and Social Care Act almost shipwrecked the David Cameron-led coalition, so loud were the voices of experts rightly warning against it. The then NHS CEO, David Nicholson, himself called that upheaval so colossal “it can be seen from space” as it broke the NHS into fragments, putting every service out to tender to anyone, public or private, enforced by competition law. Every part of the NHS had to bid and compete against others for any service: co-operation was illegally anti-competitive. This costly bureaucratic nightmare failed on every front while its privatising intent let Virgin Care and others eat into profitable community services.

Simon Stevens has spent his eight years in charge of [NHS](#) England struggling to reintegrate the fragments. This bill, the sum of his efforts, revokes the cursed Section 75 that forces tendering out [NHS](#) services. Instead, it sets into law England’s 42 integrated care systems (ICS) designed to unite hospital, community, GP and mental services with local authority care and public health, to cooperate under one board with one budget for its local population.

But No 10 has added a nuclear ingredient: NHS England or any ICS can have its decision-making seized from it by the secretary of state or the prime minister on any pretext, and they will control appointments to those 42 boards. Expect politically obedient cronies.

This shifts the localising, accountable flavour of this bill. Where Stevens has reigned supreme, cleverly manoeuvring against the Treasury over funding, his successor will have no such creative independence, and will be subservient to political masters. The word is that Dido Harding, she of the £37bn test-and-trace failure, is out of the running, now that her riding friend, Matt Hancock, has gone. The front-runner should be the [well-respected Amanda Pritchard](#), effectively NHS England’s deputy CEO. From outside the NHS, Leeds city council chief executive Tom Riordan is an interesting candidate, but can the job be done without deep NHS knowledge?

That's something a contentious third contender has: Mark Britnell spent 20 years in the NHS, reaching a director-generalship. But since 2009 he has been KPMG's senior partner for global healthcare, from where he sat on the board advising Cameron on those disastrous 2012 reforms. He surfaced in public in 2011 [when caught out telling a conference](#) of private US healthcare executives that: "In future, the NHS will be a state insurance provider not a state deliverer," praising the competition element in the Lansley reforms that meant: "The NHS will be shown no mercy and the best time to take advantage of this will be in the next couple of years."

He claimed those quotes "did not properly reflect the discussion" but has never denied the lethal words. Private consultants have been on a constant revolving door with the NHS: [management consultant use trebled](#) between 2016 and 2019, despite pledges to reduce the practice. To choose him would signal a defiant culture war confrontation, suggesting Sajid Javid really does lean toward the views of his favourite writer, Ayn Rand, from whose book The Fountainhead he reads the courtroom scene [twice a year](#): the NHS is surely Rand's perfect symbol of oppressive socialist statism.

The [highly politicised selectors shortlisting applicants for the new head](#) of the NHS are from No 10, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office. Bizarrely, candidates get a full day's psychometric testing. While experts say basic competences need testing – some high-fliers turn out to be innumerate – a full day means personality testing, which in such a senior job is as much use as phrenology, and far less use than the Harry Potter sorting hat. Under this level of political control, here's hoping the winner has the cunning to appease their political masters in interviews, but once in post will spring out as a Tiggerishly independent NHS defender.

This bill is a gift to Labour: Javid's leaked letter asking for delay warned of "significant areas of contention" to be resolved. You bet. How can the bill legislate for joining up with cash-starved local authorities, without a social care plan? The bill gives ICSs 70 stern performance measures to meet, but the previous 18-week waiting limit has vanished, only measuring 52-week waits. Numbers of patients needlessly blocking NHS beds will be counted against each ICS, but what can they do when there's too little social care to release patients? "Choice" will be enforced from on high, but with 5 million waiting, where are the spare beds to allow it?

Labour in power effectively abolished waiting beyond 18 weeks, often by using the same “terror and targets” methods – but here’s the crucial difference: that was in return for an NHS budget rising by 7% a year. In the last decade, the NHS budget per capita fell in a rapidly ageing population. Don’t expect fiscally tough Javid to demand enough from the Treasury to make these new ICSs flourish. He’s right to fear this bill is “contentious”: it’s packed with ammunition for Labour.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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Labour didn't lose its 'red wall' – it never had one

David Edgerton

The idea that working-class people voted Labour until Brexit came along is a fiction only the Conservatives benefit from



'Labour needs to understand its own history, celebrate its successes and love itself, its members and its voters.' Labour leader Keir Starmer and MP Kim Leadbeater celebrate her victory in the Batley and Spen by-election.
Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

'Labour needs to understand its own history, celebrate its successes and love itself, its members and its voters.' Labour leader Keir Starmer and MP Kim Leadbeater celebrate her victory in the Batley and Spen by-election.
Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 9 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

One of the most popular explanations for Labour's poor electoral performances in both [Hartlepool](#) and [Batley and Spen](#) is that a mythical

group of working-class people voted solidly for Labour until Jeremy Corbyn and Brexit came along. This idea is stubbornly persistent in political analysis, yet it's bunk. Labour has seen its vote share collapse, both nationally and in these seats, three times over the last 50 years. Indeed, the belief that working-class people traditionally voted Labour has only been true (and barely so) for a mere 25 years of British history, and a long time ago.

The working classes of the Edwardian years, from where our cloth-cap-and-shawl images of miners, shipbuilders and textile workers come, mostly voted Liberal and Tory. In the interwar years when [Labour](#) first stood as a national party, the Tories always got more votes. Labour's best performance was in 1935, when it secured 38.6% of the vote. But at the time, the working classes accounted for 75% of Britain's population, and many of them voted Tory.

At a reasonable guess, the only period when even a slim majority of the working class consistently voted Labour was during the 25-year period between 1945 and 1970. Even though Britain was an overwhelmingly working-class nation, Labour never managed to secure even 50% of the total vote. In these years, Labour's vote share hovered between [43% and 48%](#). Its highest-ever share of the vote was in 1951, the point at which – as [Eric Hobsbawm](#) memorably put it – the forward march of Labour halted.

The period from 1945 into the 1970s was without question Labour's moment of success. Not only did it win elections, but it transformed British society. But over the last half century, as Labour's halted forward march went into reverse, its vote share fell and oscillated wildly. Between the 1970s and 1983 the party's share of the vote [collapsed to 28%](#). A similar fall took place between 1997 and 2010 (when the [Labour vote was reduced to 29%](#)), and between 2017 and 2019. In fact Labour did better in 2019 than in 1983 or 2010, with 32% of the vote. Scotland dramatically dumped Labour, the largest party in the country, in 2015. In 2021, the party's vote share continues to fall: in the recent by-elections in [Hartlepool](#) and [Batley and Spen](#), Labour had a lower share of the vote than it had in these seats at the 1983 election under Michael Foot.

That is not obvious from the case of Batley and Spen, where Kim Leadbeater won the seat by a slim margin (as a result of our first-past-the-post system, she [won with only 35% of the vote](#)). At the national level we also need to distinguish clearly between what share of the overall vote a party gets, and whether they win. In 1935 Labour got 38% of the vote but only 25% of seats. In 2019 it got a lower share of votes but a higher share of seats. The perversity does not end there: although Labour was more popular with voters in 2019, when it got a larger share of the vote than in 1983, 1987, 2010 or 2015, it got a lower number of seats in 2019 than in any of these elections.

Indeed, once we look beyond the fallacious, Westminster-centric view of elections, which measures the popularity of a party according to how many seats they get rather than their share of the vote, a very different story of Labour leaders' political success emerges. In 1997 Tony Blair did as well (but no better) than Hugh Gaitskill did in 1959, but Blair won a huge parliamentary majority whereas Gaitskell lost seats. In 2017, Jeremy Corbyn did slightly better in terms of vote share than Harold Wilson in 1974; but while Wilson won a parliamentary majority, Corbyn was only able to deprive Theresa May of hers.

Nor should we think of the so-called red-wall seats as if they were stuck until recently in some unthinking Labourist la-la land. They followed national trends, not least electorally. And since 1970 there have been two powerful upswings in Labour's vote share, which increased from [1983 to a peak in 1997 \(44%\)](#), and from a nadir in 2010 to the second peak in 2017 (41%). Blair and Corbyn both increased Labour's share nationally, and in all kinds of seats. In Hartlepool Labour's recent vote share peaked in 1997 and 2017, in Batley and Spen in 2001 and 2017. There were deep troughs in 1983 and 2010. It is, tellingly, the same story in southern [Chesham and Amersham](#) – troughs in 1983 and 2010 and peaks in 1997 and 2017.

Even more absurd is the notion of an unchanging working class recently betrayed by Labour. The working class has changed radically since Labour's heyday. Where once it was made up of miners and factory workers, today it includes (among others) health service, education and hospitality workers. There are no miners left, and far fewer factory workers today. The working class is more female, better educated and not captured by the [43% of the](#)

population whom advertisers class as “C2DE”, both because a quarter think of themselves as middle class but also because workers are not limited to the old “manual” occupations this archaic definition rests on.

The phenomenon of a working-class red wall is an ideological concoction that benefits Labour’s enemies. It makes little sociological or psephological sense today, and the fragment of the past it reflects is one of Tory working classes. Yet this group has come to define how Labour thinks of the working class. That the party views this Tory analysis as a bellwether of its fortunes speaks to its collapse as an independent, transformative political force. If it is ever to win significant support today among real English people, Labour needs to understand its own history, celebrate its successes and love itself, its members and its voters.

Labour undoubtedly still needs the working-class vote. Winning this means creating a Labour party for workers and trade unionists in the present day, not those of a mythologised past. Doing better among those workers than Labour did in its heyday would also be necessary for electoral success. The party needs to relearn not only how to get votes, but how to keep them too, which it has failed to do for decades. To make all this possible it needs to present a real alternative with vigour and confidence, and to stop acting as if it believed that this uniquely dangerous Conservative government had the British past, present and future in its bones.

- David Edgerton is Hans Rausing Professor of the history of science and technology and professor of modern British history at King’s College London. He is the author of *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: a Twentieth Century History*



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[OpinionEngland](#)

Win or lose on Sunday, England have given us something to be proud of

[Simon Hattenstone](#)



Euro 2020 has seen football rediscover its sense of fun, beauty and solidarity, and helped us forget the last 16 months



‘In an era when our politicians have shown themselves to be inept, amoral and hypocritical, these young men have proved to be genuine role models for us all.’ England v Denmark Euro 2020 semifinal, 7 July 2021.
Photograph: Paul Marriott/Rex/Shutterstock

‘In an era when our politicians have shown themselves to be inept, amoral and hypocritical, these young men have proved to be genuine role models for us all.’ England v Denmark Euro 2020 semifinal, 7 July 2021.
Photograph: Paul Marriott/Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 8 Jul 2021 07.30 EDT

It was a night of unparalleled hyperbole. Football might not have yet come home, but poetic licence certainly had. “The next 30 minutes could change your life,” warned the ITV match commentator, Sam Matterface, portentously as we entered extra time. “The good times have never felt so good,” he panted as England took the lead. And then the final whistle. “Open your eyes as wide as the Wembley arch and take note of where you are and who you’re with.”

And so it came to pass that England's men's team [reached the final](#) of a major football tournament for the first time in 55 years – courtesy of an own goal, a saved penalty (of course) successfully followed up by Harry Kane, the substitution of substitute Jack Grealish for looking dangerously creative, and a massed defence holding out against an exhausted 10-man Denmark. Still Matterface wasn't done. "Call your boss, you ain't coming in in the morning," he commanded. Pandemic, Covid, WFH – WTF? It was as if the past 16 months simply hadn't happened, and we were back in 2020 living the dream.

[Sterling and Saka lead charge as England throw off old anxieties](#) | Jonathan Wilson

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And in a way, we were. In July 2021, England were playing in the semi-finals of Euro 2020. There was something Kafkaesque about it all – and, of course, capitalist-esque. [Uefa issued a statement](#) explaining exactly why Euro 2020 would stay as Euro 2020 even though it was actually now 2021. "This choice is in line with Uefa's commitment to make Uefa Euro 2020 sustainable and not to generate additional amounts of waste," European football's governing body stated with a heroically straight face, before admitting in the next sentence that it would be crazy to let all its lucrative branding go to waste. Cynicism knows no bounds among the football mafia.

And yet despite the verbiage, the crass nationalism, the political exploitation (the PM in a [number 10 Boris England shirt](#), natch) and grotesque product placement (thank you, [Cristiano Ronaldo](#) for sliding the omnipresent two bottles of sponsored Coke out of sight in his televised interview and encouraging us to drink *agua*), there has been something fabulously uplifting about the tournament that goes well beyond England's success. This has been a championship in which football has rediscovered its sense of fun, beauty and solidarity.

00:30

'Drink water': Ronaldo's gesture a snub to Euros sponsor Coca-Cola – video

It started horrifically, with [Christian Eriksen having a cardiac arrest](#) and having to be resuscitated on the pitch. But the lasting image is of his

anguished teammates forming a military guard around him to protect his privacy. When Denmark's match with Finland resumed a few hours later Finnish fans chanted "Christian" with the Danish fans responding "Eriksen". Proper lump-in-the-throat stuff, and particularly moving after the absence of crowds for so much of the pandemic. Best of all, Eriksen is making a good recovery.

The football itself has been a joy – by and large open, adventurous and uninhibited (ironically, with the notable exception of Gareth Southgate's pragmatic England). On one glorious day [Spain beat Croatia 5-3](#), followed a few hours later by [Switzerland knocking out the World Cup holders, France](#), on penalties after a 3-3 draw – possibly the greatest day ever of tournament football.

Refreshingly, youth has been given its head. On 13 June [England's Jude Bellingham](#) became the youngest player to appear in the Euros, at 17. Six days later, [Poland's Kacper Kozłowski](#) superseded him. As for the fun, at the other end of the age scale was Italy's veteran captain, Giorgio Chiellini, joshing with Spain's Jordi Alba, play-punching, and wrapping him in a huge bear hug just before the penalty shootout to decide which team got through to the final. Alba may not have enjoyed it, but we did.

Even VAR has behaved itself in this tournament, playing second fiddle to the referees and overturning decisions only when there have been unambiguous mistakes. In fact, VAR has been so well behaved, it even kept its mouth shut when there had been an unambiguous mistake in the [awarding of the penalty](#) that led to England's winning goal last night. As for the refs themselves, they have controlled the games quietly, competently, and with matinee-idol good looks. German ref Felix Brych could give prime-time Warren Beatty a run for his money.

And then there is [England](#) – now the second most successful men's international football team in the country's history, eclipsed only by the World Cup winners of 1966. It's hard not to kvell over their achievement (albeit in the far easier half of the draw, and playing all but one match at Wembley), their unity and humility.

But there is something even more impressive about this group. After decades of seeing players get rich quick and keeping stumm in the face of social injustice, here is a generation of footballers with values. Many struggled in their childhoods, experienced first-hand what the years of Tory austerity stripped from society, and stood up to racism. Now they are determined to use their clout and wealth to support today's disadvantaged kids. Marcus Rashford won an MBE for his campaign against food poverty, and Raheem Sterling won one for his services to racial equality in sport. Jordan Henderson and Harrys Kane and Maguire raised millions for the NHS in the pandemic, Jadon Sancho helped build a state-of-the art pitch for youngsters in south-east London.

If England beat Italy on Sunday and win the European Championship, they will write themselves into history. But in the end, that's just football. Far more impressive is that in an era when our politicians have shown themselves to be inept, amoral and hypocritical, these young men have proved to be genuine role models for us all. Regardless of whether the team win or lose on Sunday, this is something we – and they – should be proud of.

- Simon Hattenstone is a Guardian feature writer
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I hate to say it but it looks like the age of fossil fuels will end in the next few years

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Haiti

Florida entrepreneur accused by Haiti of taking part in Jovenel Moïse killing

James Solages is one of two Haitian Americans the government said it arrested in connection with the killing at the presidential residence

01:20

Haiti: crowds protest after arrest of Jovenel Moïse assassination suspects – video

[Julian Borger in Washington](#)

Fri 9 Jul 2021 01.45 EDT

The Haitian government has accused a Florida entrepreneur and former security guard of being involved in the [assassination of Jovenel Moïse](#).

James Solages is one of two Haitian Americans the government said it arrested in Port-au-Prince in connection with Wednesday's killing at the presidential residence. The other was named as Joseph Vincent, but little is known about him.

Solages, on the other hand, has an extensive online presence as the head of a maintenance and repair company and a Haitian charity. His LinkedIn profile said he had been a "diplomatic agent", had completed a protection course and had been "the chief commander of body-guards" at the Canadian embassy in Haiti.

[Haiti president assassination: 26 Colombians, two US-Haitians took part in Jovenel Moïse killing, police say](#)

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The country's foreign ministry, Global Affairs Canada, confirmed to the Canadian press that Solages was "briefly employed as a reserve bodyguard by a security company hired by Global Affairs Canada in 2010".

A man resembling Solages was one of the prisoners paraded in front of the press by the Haitian police on Thursday. He was wearing a white T-shirt, and sand-coloured trousers and boots. Another man, apparently Vincent, in a similar outfit, was sitting beside him, along with 15 men said to be Colombian nationals.

The government has so far produced no evidence against Solages. The US state department has said it was aware of reports of Americans being arrested but was not able to confirm their identities.

Speaking to the [Haitian Times](#) at his home in Tamarac, near Fort Lauderdale, Solages's uncle Schubert Dorisme said that the businessman had recently become a US citizen, but aspired to become mayor of his home town, the southern Haitian port of Jacmel, and strongly opposed Moïse.

"He used to tell me, 'This Jovenel guy is crazy,'" Dorisme, a 63-year-old bus driver, said. But he added: "I don't think he's capable to do this thing, I think somebody used him."

"He was not steady," Dorisme said. "He was a good boy, but I wouldn't call him a man."

As well as running a building firm, Solages, 35, is the president of the board of a charity called Fwa Sa A Jacmel Avan (Creole for This Time Jacmel First), which claims to combat child hunger in the southern town.

The organisation's website was taken down on Thursday, but his archived biography page described him as "a youth leader and an advocate for underprivileged kids" but also "a politician promoting his country by focusing on compassion".

The website showed Solages surrounded by Haitian children under the words "rebuild Haiti". The [Sun-Sentinel newspaper](#) reported that the organisation raised \$11,000 in 2019.

The Haitian ambassador to Washington, [Bocchit Edmond](#), said on Wednesday he had asked the White House for assistance in the investigation

into the assassination. The White House spokesperson, Jen Psaki, said the US was willing to help but was yet to receive a formal request.

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Haiti

Haiti police say 26 Colombians, two US-Haitians took part in Jovenel Moïse assassination

Seventeen captured men paraded in front of journalists, as police chief says another three were killed and eight remain on the run

01:20

Haiti: crowds protest after arrest of Jovenel Moïse assassination suspects – video

Tom Phillips, Peter Beaumont, Jean Daniel Delone in Port-au-Prince and agencies

Thu 8 Jul 2021 22.49 EDT

A heavily armed commando unit that assassinated Haiti's president, Jovenel Moïse, was composed of 26 Colombians and two Haitian Americans, authorities have said, as the hunt goes on for the masterminds of the killing.

Moïse, 53, was [fatally shot early on Wednesday](#) at his home by what officials said was a group of foreign, trained killers, pitching the poorest country in the Americas deeper into turmoil amid political divisions, hunger and widespread gang violence.

Authorities tracked the suspected assassins on Wednesday to a house near the scene of the crime in Petionville, a northern, hillside suburb of the capital, Port-au-Prince. A firefight lasted late into the night and authorities detained a number of suspects on Thursday.

[‘No one’s in charge’: Haiti faces violent new era after killing of president](#)
[Read more](#)

Police chief Léon Charles paraded 17 men before journalists at a news conference late on Thursday, showing a number of Colombian passports

plus assault rifles, machetes, walkie-talkies and materials including bolt cutters and hammers.

“Foreigners came to our country to kill the president,” Charles said. “There were 26 Colombians, identified by their passports, and two Haitian Americans as well.”

He said 15 Colombians were captured, as well as two Haitian Americans. Three of the assailants were killed and eight remained on the run, Charles said.



Police in Haiti displayed passports, weapons, tools and other items to the media along with the men suspected of assassinating president Jovenel Moïse. Photograph: Reuters

Eleven of the suspects were arrested after breaking into the embassy of Taiwan in Port-au-Prince, which sits near the residence where Moïse was killed, a statement from Taiwan’s ministry of foreign affairs said.

Early on Thursday morning embassy security discovered the “group of armed suspects”, described as “mercenaries” in [the ministry’s statement](#), and notified the Haitian government. Taiwan agreed “without hesitation” to allow Haitian police access, a spokeswoman said.

“The Haitian police launched an operation at about 4pm … and successfully arrested 11 suspected armed criminals. The process was smooth and the suspects did not resist.” The spokeswoman did not provide the nationalities of the arrested men.

The embassy had been closed on Wednesday as a safety measure in response to the assassination and staff had been working from home.

Colombia’s defence minister, Diego Molano, said in a statement that preliminary information indicated that Colombians involved in the attack were retired members of the country’s military. He said Bogotá would cooperate in the investigation.

Haiti’s minister of elections and interparty relations, Mathias Pierre, identified the Haitian-American suspects as James Solages, 35, and Joseph Vincent, 55.

A state department spokesperson could not confirm if any US citizens were among those detained, but US authorities were in regular contact with Haitian officials, including investigative authorities, to discuss how the US could provide assistance.

Officials in the mostly French- and Creole-speaking Caribbean nation had said on Wednesday the assassins appeared to have spoken in English and Spanish.

“It was a full, well-equipped commando, with more than six cars and a lot of equipment,” Pierre said.

Officials have not yet given a motive for the killing.

Moïse, a 53-year-old former banana exporter who took office in 2017, was murdered at his family home in the hills above Port-au-Prince about 1am local time on Wednesday. The first lady, Martine Moïse, was also wounded and later evacuated to Miami, where she is reportedly in a stable condition.



Children look for metal pieces in cars burnt by locals after a firefight between police and the suspected assassins of president Moïse. Photograph: Reuters

According to new details that have emerged in local reports, the attackers tied up staff, and one of Moïse's three children survived by hiding in her brother's bedroom.

Moïse was shot at least a dozen times and died at the scene, according to Carl Henry Destin, a judicial official, who said the president's office and bedroom were ransacked.

"We found him lying on his back, with blue trousers, a white blood-stained shirt, his mouth open, the left eye gouged out," Destin told Haiti's main newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste*.

As details of the audacious raid emerged, [Haiti was enveloped by profound political uncertainty](#) and the streets of the capital emptied as many residents chose to stay at home. "I really don't know what to say ... the insecurity is too much," said Darline Garnier, a 23-year-old university student from Pétionville, near where the president was killed.

"It's a humiliation for our nation," said Luckner Meronvil, a 46-year-old taxi driver, tears welling in his eyes as he spoke.

Theories about who was behind the killing ran wild in Haiti and in the neighbouring Dominican Republic, which shares the same island. Amid claims that some of those involved in the attack had spoken Spanish, the Dominican paper [Diario Libre reported](#) that investigators there were examining the possibility that some of the assassins may have used the country to access or flee Haiti.

And in the febrile atmosphere, competing – and so far unverified – theories have continued to emerge, one suggesting that a hit squad of Colombians and Venezuelans contracted to powerful figures in Haiti involved in drug trafficking and other criminality had ordered the killing, or that the killing involved individuals linked to Moïse's own security staff.

Many people in Haiti had wanted Moïse to resign. Since taking over in 2017 he had faced calls to leave office and mass protests, first over corruption allegations and his management of the economy and then over his increasing grip on power.



The crowd near the police station where the armed men accused of involvement in the assassination of president Jovenel Moïse were detained in Port au Prince, Haiti. Photograph: Valerie Baeriswyl/AFP/Getty Images

On Thursday Haitians woke up to a country without a head of state, with a parliament long suspended, two rival interim prime ministers – one of whom was due to be sworn in during the coming days – and a constitutional legal vacuum after the death from coronavirus of the head of its supreme court.

[Haiti security forces arrest six alleged gunmen after president's assassination](#)

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That has generated confusion about who is the legitimate leader of the country of 11 million people – Joseph, who has assumed power for now, or Ariel Henry, who was appointed as prime minister by Moïse just before his death and was due to be sworn in this week.

“All the cards are up in the air,” Fatton said of the apparent struggle between Henry and Joseph.

Ryan Berg, an analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said: “I can picture a scenario under which there are issues regarding to whom the armed forces and national police are loyal, in the case there are rival claims to being placeholder president of the country.”

Pierre, the elections minister, said on Thursday night that a presidential vote as well as a constitutional referendum that had been slated for 26 September before the assassination of Moïse would go ahead as planned.

“It [the vote] was not for Jovenel Moïse as president – it was a requirement to get a more stable country, a more stable political system, so I think we will continue with that,” Pierre said. He added that preparations had long been under way and millions of dollars disbursed to carry out the votes.

Additional reporting by Helen Davidson

This article was amended on 9 July 2021 to correct the name of the police chief from Charles Leon to Léon Charles.

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'It will be a catastrophe': fate of Syria's last aid channel rests in Russia's hands

Possible veto of Bab al-Hawa UN aid crossing could halt the flow of vital food and health supplies to 3.4 million people



A human chain is formed by aid workers, medical and rescue services during protests to allow humanitarian aid to enter Syria through Bab al-Hawa, 2 July 2021, Idlib, Syria. Photograph: Omar Haj Kadour/AFP/Getty Images

A human chain is formed by aid workers, medical and rescue services during protests to allow humanitarian aid to enter Syria through Bab al-Hawa, 2 July 2021, Idlib, Syria. Photograph: Omar Haj Kadour/AFP/Getty Images

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HUMANITY UNITED

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[Bethan McKernan](#) and [Hussein Akoush](#)

Fri 9 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Just over half a mile away from the Bab al-Hawa border crossing connecting Syria and [Turkey](#) a 6th-century triumphal arch still stands, the remains of a Roman road stretching straight as an arrow on either side. For millennia this part of the world has been a crossroads of trade, culture and history. Today, it's more important than ever.

Bab al-Hawa is Syria's last lifeline, through which vital UN aid supplies for 3.4 million people living in the war-torn north-west of the country arrive. But before 10 July, the [security council must vote](#) in New York on whether to keep the aid flowing. What might seem like an obvious decision to outsiders is actually far from certain: Russia may use its veto power as a permanent member of the council to close the UN's last access point, as it has managed to do with the other three aid crossings.

That the UN's assistance for Syrians living outside the regime's control could suddenly end this week is a reminder not just that the international community has failed the Syrian people, but how the conflict has broken the mechanisms built to keep the world safe.



Syrian refugees in Idlib receive humanitarian aid, 30 June. Aid workers say 1.8 million people living in camps will lose food supplies if the Bab al-Hawa crossing is suspended. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Compared with many areas deeper inside the country, Bab al-Hawa is an island of order and stability: manicured lawns and trees surround the crossing offices and the asphalt is clean and smooth. Hundreds of aid and commercial lorries pass through each day.

Employees inspect more than 30,000 tonnes of aid a month, about 60% of which comes from the UN. The vast majority – 87.5% – is food, with the rest made up of medicine, other health supplies, clothes, sanitation and hygiene equipment, according to the crossing's spokesperson, Mazen Alloush.



Aid worker Bakri al-Obeid. Photograph: Ghaith Alsayed/The Guardian

“If the UN aid entry is suspended, the crossing won’t close, but it will be a catastrophe,” aid worker Bakri al-Obeid said. “The knock-on effects would be huge: about 1.8 million people living in camps will lose food supplies, 2.3 million will lose clean water, and half of the hospitals will lose funding. Food prices will go up and bakeries will close down.”

Across north-west Syria, need is acute. After a decade of war, the area is the last that remains outside Bashar al-Assad’s control, after [military intervention](#) from his Russian allies in 2015 turned the tide of the war in the government’s favour. The population of Idlib city and the surrounding countryside has swollen from one million to about 3.4 million as displaced people have fled the regime’s advance, with two-thirds living in camps or other makeshift accommodation.

The region is, for the most part, ruled by an Islamist militant group, leaving civilians trapped between the two forces. A [2020 ceasefire is routinely ignored](#): regime airstrikes regularly target civilian infrastructure, stretching the limited health facilities to breaking point.

Last year’s [collapse of the Syrian pound](#) sent food prices soaring, and the arrival of Covid-19 has [exacerbated the level of need](#) across the entire

country – but the north-west is suffering the most.

“If the aid crossing is closed, we would have to shut down the hospital operations within a week,” said Dr Tarraf al-Tarraf, a urologist who switches to emergency surgery whenever there is a new wave of bombings. “It will be a total disaster ... Closing Bab al-Hawa is using aid as a weapon.”



A mother and her baby at the Idlib camp, near the Bab al-Hawa border gate, Syria 30 June. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

International aid has been deeply politicised since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. “It was clear right from 2011 that it was going to be hard to get the Russians to engage in any meaningful way,” a senior western diplomat said of early UN efforts to stop the regime’s violence against Arab spring protesters.

After it became clear that a series of peace talks known as the Geneva process, along with other diplomatic efforts, were not going to bring a timely end to the fighting, many at the UN decided to focus on what could be done to alleviate the humanitarian situation.

Eventually, in 2014, member states agreed on Resolution 2165, built on legal justifications, which allowed the UN to operate without the permission of the Damascus government and provide aid directly to rebel-held areas

through four border crossings – two with Turkey, one with Iraq and one with Jordan.

Graphic

“It was a very difficult negotiation, but we were able to push it through by taking advantage of the fact the Ukraine crisis was unfolding as well as the Winter Olympics in Sochi, putting Moscow on the back foot,” the diplomat said. “It was [a huge breakthrough in our efforts](#) to bring relief to the people of Syria. Even if it didn’t work as smoothly as we would have liked, it was a big step.”

In January 2020, however, arguing that the ground situation had changed, Russia used the threat of a total veto to [cut the crossing on the Iraqi border; in July](#), it cut another in the north-west. (Al-Ramtha, on the Jordanian border, became less crucial after 2018, when the regime took back control of the area.)



A human chain is formed by aid workers and activists during protests to keep the Bab al-Hawa crossing open, 2 July, Idlib. Photograph: Rami Alsayed/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Today, only Bab al-Hawa remains – and the Russian delegation to the UN has hinted again that it will veto extending the resolution’s mandate when it

expires next week.

Moscow has long maintained that all, rather than part of the UN's aid to Syria should be distributed centrally through the Syrian government, blaming Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the militant group in control in Idlib, along with Turkey, which backs some rebel groups, for not allowing aid from Damascus.



Children shelter in one of the camps along the frontier between Turkey and north-west Syria. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Based on bitter experience, however, Syrians in the north-west know that if the regime controls the flow of aid, they are unlikely to see any of it. "When eastern Ghouta was under siege the only humanitarian corridor was with the regime," said Obeid. "People there starved to death."

Efforts to keep Bab al-Hawa open – and restore the other two crossings – have gone into overdrive in capitals across the world before the New York showdown. Mark Cutts, the UN's deputy regional humanitarian coordinator for Syria, said it is crucial that member states understand the scale of the potential crisis.

"We have managed to run a massive aid operation for 10 years, supporting civilians on different sides of the front line. We need security council

support to continue providing cross-border aid in north-west Syria, where there is artillery shelling and bombing virtually every day,” he said.

“The war is not over. Our cross-border operation from Turkey has proven to be the safest and most direct route. To cut off that lifeline would be a crime.”

[Syria aid cut could come back to bite UK, warns UN official](#)

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While aid agencies have realised since the first crossing was closed in 2020 that they may need to make contingency plans to bypass the UN and rely instead on local partners, there is no real or immediate working alternative to Bab al-Hawa.

The vote is also being watched warily by Washington and Moscow as a harbinger of future relations. “The problem is that, even if Moscow doesn’t use its veto this time, it just kicks the can down the road for six months, or maybe a year, depending on how long the mandate is extended for,” said Dareen Khalifa, senior Syria analyst with the International Crisis Group.

“Putting the lifeline of three million Syrians up for negotiations every six to 12 months, is an unsustainable situation. And Syrian civilians end up paying the price.”

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Victoria

‘The world is laughing at you’: Australian brothers fined for destroying mother’s home in will dispute

The pair filmed themselves wrecking the house in Murtoa, Victoria, after their sister was named executor of their mother’s estate



Brothers Malcolm and Garry Taylor demolished part of their late mother’s home in Mortua, Victoria, and when someone called police they said they were doing renovations. Photograph: County Court of Victoria/AAP

Brothers Malcolm and Garry Taylor demolished part of their late mother’s home in Mortua, Victoria, and when someone called police they said they were doing renovations. Photograph: County Court of Victoria/AAP

Australian Associated Press

Fri 9 Jul 2021 06.52 EDT

The world is laughing at the stupidity of two brothers who destroyed their late mother's home in regional [Victoria](#) after their sister was named executor of her estate, a Victorian judge has said.

Malcolm and Garry Taylor missed out on their inheritance and have now received major fines following their dramatic response to their sister being named executor.

The judge released footage of them gleefully destroying the home in an attempt to stop their sister from inheriting a cent.

The brothers, now aged 57 and 59, travelled from their [Queensland](#) home to Murtoa, near Horsham, in March 2019 just days before the property was due to go to auction.

It had previously sold for \$99,000 but the sale fell through after the house suffered water damage. It was to be auctioned with an expected price of up to \$75,000.

But on the eve of the auction, the men hired an excavator and filmed themselves tearing down part of the home. When someone called the police, the brothers told the local officer they were doing "renovations".

Malcolm Taylor sent their sister a text saying "renovations have begun" while later that night, at a football match at the MCG, Garry Taylor posted to social media that they were having a "few beers at the footy after a hard day's renovating".

Malcolm Taylor had earlier removed a hot water service, telling a real estate agent he didn't want his sister to profit from any sale and that he'd continue taking things until there was nothing left.

"You were laughing while you destroyed your, and your sister's, inheritance. Now the world is laughing at you for your stupidity," the Victorian county court judge Michael Cahill told the brothers on Friday.

The brothers were each fined \$10,000 after admitting charges of theft and criminal damage.

During a pre-sentence hearing, the court heard Malcolm Taylor was genuinely remorseful for his actions that day.



‘You were laughing while you destroyed your, and your sister’s, inheritance,’ the judge said. Photograph: County Court of Victoria/AAP

But ahead of the sentencing, prosecutors tried to squash that argument, pointing the judge to a media report in which Malcolm Taylor replied “absolutely not” when asked by a reporter if he regretted his actions.

Mike Anderson, a lawyer appearing with both men by video link from Hervey Bay, said they had been harassed by the media over the incident.

“If your honour had any worry about the concept of deterrent, the media have done that,” he said. “There’s no way these men will ever offend again.”

It was estimated the total loss to the estate was about \$60,000 – a \$20,000 loss each. The brothers agreed in May 2019 to pay their sister a “reasonable” amount to compensate her for her lost inheritance.

They had tried to challenge their sister’s appointment as executor of their mother’s estate because of her failure to pay legacies to their children.

Cahill said they had agreed to co-operate with her after it was ordered the woman remain as executor after paying what was owed.

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