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The Observer view on US and Nato withdrawal from Afghanistan

Observer editorial

This shabby, half-hidden retreat by western forces abandons a nation to mayhem, civil war and terror



A deserted Bagram airfield after the departure of all US and Nato forces from Parwan province, eastern Afghanistan. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

A deserted Bagram airfield after the departure of all US and Nato forces from Parwan province, eastern Afghanistan. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 4 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

The conflict in [Afghanistan](#) – America's longest war – is at an end, or so President Joe Biden is expected to declare this week. At an end, too, is Britain and Nato's military involvement, dating back to the invasion that followed the 2001 al-Qaida attacks on the US. Except the conflict is not over. In truth, it is intensifying. What's changed is that the western allies are, in effect, washing their hands of it.

By setting an unconditional US withdrawal date of 11 September shortly after taking office, Biden triggered an unseemly military scramble for the exit that has been joined by all residual Nato forces, including most UK troops. It now appears the vast majority will have left by today, without ceremony or fanfare, almost by the back door. The fourth of July is American independence day. It may also come to be remembered as [deserting Afghanistan day](#).

The official silence in Britain surrounding this shabby, half-hidden retreat is deafening – partly for justifiable security reasons, but also out of sheer political embarrassment. Boris Johnson's government, so painfully dependent on Washington's favour, dare not openly criticise Biden. But ministers and army chiefs surely know his unilateral decision to quit, despite the absence of a peace deal or even a general ceasefire, is [dangerously irresponsible](#).

The withdrawal has set Afghanistan back on the path to terror, mayhem and disintegration. A catastrophe is in the making. These are not the predictions of mere armchair critics. Gen Austin Miller, commander of US forces, warned last week that [chaos beckoned](#). “Civil war is certainly a path that can be visualised if it continues on the trajectory it’s on. That should concern the world,” he said.

The former Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, is similarly [pessimistic](#). “Look at the scene. We are in shambles. The country is in conflict. There is immense suffering... Those who came here 20 years ago in the name of fighting extremism and terrorism not only failed to end it but, under their watch, extremism has flourished. That is what I call failure,” Karzai said.

[After the retreat: what now for Afghanistan?](#)

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Facts on the ground, as the *Observer*'s Emma Graham-Harrison reports, support these grim analyses. While cannily eschewing clashes with departing Nato troops, the [Taliban has mounted multiple territorial offensives](#), overrunning district after district in recent weeks. At least half of rural Afghanistan is controlled or contested by insurgents. Regional capitals, even Kabul, may be next.

President Ashraf Ghani's government looks on helplessly as its Nato-trained and equipped soldiers are repeatedly forced into flight or surrender. Faced with such incapacity, local armed militias are [reforming](#). Majority non-Pashtun groups in the north are also threatening to revive their 1990s anti-Taliban struggle.

Biden assured Ghani last month that the US would continue to provide [financial assistance and support](#). Yet lacking bases in neighbouring countries, US aircraft and drones will be hard put to provide meaningful, timely back-up.

How ironic that after all the Biden ballyhoo about America being "back", they leave – and the British are left to manage the mess.

The Pentagon says in any case that its priority is containing Islamic State and al-Qaida, whose jihadists may soon freely roam ungoverned Afghan spaces.

The American decision to throw in the towel privately horrified Britain's past and present military leadership, properly mindful of two decades of often thankless, bloody striving. Gen Sir Nick Carter, chief of the defence staff, tactfully said it was "[not a decision we hoped for](#)". Having rallied to America's side in 2001, Biden's failure to fully consult the UK and Nato was especially galling.

After the failure of US peace talks in Doha, Carter and UK diplomats in Kabul are quietly encouraging increased security and political cooperation between the Afghan government and Pakistan, a key Taliban supporter and influencer. How ironic that after all the Biden ballyhoo about America being "back", they leave – and the British are left to [manage the mess](#).

For the Afghan people, the prospect of renewed anarchy is plainly terrifying. Limited recent gains – democratic governance, free expression and improved healthcare, education and civil and women's rights – are all imperilled. So, too, are the sacrifices of the tens of thousands of civilians and soldiers, Afghan and foreign, who died or saw their lives permanently

scarred. Blighted is the hope of justice for those unlawfully killed or, for example, illegally tortured at the CIA's black site at [Bagram airfield](#).

For western countries that imposed forcible regime change in Kabul, then promised to build a new nation of laws forged in their own image, this weekend marks a chastening moment. Who knows what historians will make of George W Bush's ill-conceived, too-costly Afghan adventurism? Yet as matters stand now, it's unlikely, thankfully, that any western leader will again risk a similar gamble.

The death last week of Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary who oversaw the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, is a reminder of just how immeasurable, lethal and lasting are the [terrible harms](#) done by him and other neoconservatives and reckless ideologues in the Bush-Cheney administration, none of whom has ever been satisfactorily called to account. Like Iraq, coldly abandoned to its fate 10 years ago, Afghanistan's post-American future is deeply daunting.

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The Observer view on the Batley and Spen byelection campaign and result

Observer editorial

Kim Leadbeater and decency triumphed, but lessons must be learned from an ugly campaign



Kim Leadbeater's work and campaign focused on making politics more civil and bringing communities together. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Kim Leadbeater's work and campaign focused on making politics more civil and bringing communities together. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Sun 4 Jul 2021 01.30 EDT

Last week Labour defied expectations and narrowly won the byelection in Batley and Spen. It is first and foremost a victory for Kim Leadbeater, sister of the murdered MP Jo Cox, who ran a dignified, unifying campaign in the face of homophobic and sexist abuse. But it is also likely to sufficiently shift the political narrative about Labour's fortunes to buy Keir Starmer more time to present an alternative vision to the one propounded by the toxic, incompetent government of [Boris Johnson](#).

Leadbeater has rightly won accolades for her positive and constructive campaign. It must have taken immense bravery to run in the parliamentary seat held by her sister, [killed](#) by a far-right terrorist in 2016. She has spent the years since her sister's death leading the work of the Jo Cox Foundation in the local area to promote more compassionate and cohesive communities.

How dreadful, then, that the byelection attracted the attentions of the extremist chancer George Galloway, whose brand of divisive politics is not so dissimilar from the far-right views associated with her sister's death. Galloway, who was sacked from TalkRadio for [an allegedly antisemitic tweet](#), ran a deeply [misogynistic campaign](#) against the Labour MP Naz Shah in 2015, and has worked for the Russian and Iranian state TV channels RT and Press TV. He enthusiastically channelled his bigotry into Batley and Spen. Chris Williamson, the MP currently suspended from the Labour party amid the row over antisemitism, campaigned alongside him, and he spoke at a rally with divisive activist Laurence Fox. Labour campaigners report being [egged and physically assaulted](#) and subjected to [homophobic taunts](#), no doubt stirred up by Galloway's use of tropes about sex education in his campaigning.

During the campaign, footage emerged of Leadbeater being verbally abused. She has required police protection during the campaign. That she has been subjected to this is even more shocking in light of what happened to her sister. Such a divisive campaign will leave its mark on her community long after Galloway has stopped giving media interviews. With her longstanding mission to make politics more civil and her community work to bring people together, Leadbeater is the right person to represent Batley and Spen.

While decency triumphed, Galloway still managed to attract more than 8,000 votes, and in this there is a warning for both mainstream parties. For Labour, this byelection win cannot disguise the long-term trends that have eroded its voter base in its heartland seats. Leadbeater was a strong local candidate, but a clear articulation of what Labour is for nationally is still missing. It is early days, but as May's local election results show, Starmer has not yet done enough to edge Labour back to electability. He has not developed a message that can unite the broad electoral coalition that could deliver Labour a victory under first-past-the-post.

For the Conservatives, their defeat in the Amersham byelection and now in Batley suggests their pitch to the electorate, a big part of which is seeding the culture wars, is not only contemptible but not as effective as they think. In recent months, we have seen ministers try to distract from the government's handling of the pandemic by picking fights with anti-racist campaigners about statues, with student societies about their common rooms, and with the BBC over lyrics at the Proms. In the recent Chesham and Amersham byelection, this turned off their own heartland voters. Batley and Spen shows another risk of this strategy: there are always extremists on hand who are willing to ride in and run a campaign that is even more toxic and divisive.

Jo Cox was a fierce campaigner against populist extremism; in [her own words](#), “we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us”. Five years after her murder, her sister’s victory in Batley and Spen serves as a reminder that the only way politicians should seek to win and govern is through uniting the country around a common vision of who we are, rather than through pitting different groups of people against each other.

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[Observer comment cartoon](#)

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After Batley and Spen, where now for Keir Starmer? – cartoon

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How the Twitter tide of plastic lost at sea has come to define our age

[Tim Adams](#)



An artist's images of tiny toys and figurines dumped in the ocean highlight the wasteful ways we have to change



This plastic Robin Hood figurine, given away free in packets of Kellogg's cornflakes 50 or 60 years ago, was found during a beach clean at Perranporth in North Cornwall. Photograph: Tracey Williams @legolostatsea

This plastic Robin Hood figurine, given away free in packets of Kellogg's cornflakes 50 or 60 years ago, was found during a beach clean at Perranporth in North Cornwall. Photograph: Tracey Williams @legolostatsea

Sun 4 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Legoland

Social media was made for projects like Tracey Williams's [#LegoLostatSea](#), which anecdotally charts the plastic that has been dumped in the ocean in the past 70 years. Williams [began her mission](#) after becoming obsessed with the container of 4.8m Lego pieces that spilled from a cargo ship 20 miles off Land's End in 1997, and which continue to be washed up on Cornwall's beaches every day. The fact that many of those Lego sets had a nautical

theme – mini plastic octupuses and divers’ flippers are common finds – makes them a perfect metaphor for the 8m tonnes of plastic that end up in the oceans each year. At current rates, there will be more plastic than fish in the sea by 2050. A special report in the journal *Science* last week launched a campaign for governments to commit to phase out “virgin” plastic production in the next 20 years. Even if that happens, our age will be known for centuries to come for its detritus: the Happy Meal figurines and plastic bottles and Lego snorkellers that come and go on every tide.

Graveyard shift



‘The less visited parts of the graveyard are fabulously overgrown with ivy and wild flowers.’ Photograph: Niklas Halle’n/AFP/Getty Images

Most days I walk down the lane which runs between the two halves of Highgate cemetery in north London, resting place of Karl Marx and Jeremy Beadle. The rows of Victorian monuments and tombs in the less visited parts of the graveyard are fabulously overgrown with ivy and wild flowers, and quite thickly wooded, a sight that never fails to conjure, in me at least, a sense of natural renewal and a welcome jolt of seize-the-day purpose. A new 25-year sustainability plan for the graveyard involves the removal of many trees, opening up views of the Shard and St Paul’s Cathedral. “Romantic decay is attractive but also destructive,” the cemetery’s chief executive, Ian

Dungavell, said. His longer-term tenants are not part of the consultation process.

Blowing smoke



'Fat cigar': George Galloway smoking. Photograph: Carl de Souza/AFP/Getty Images

I never hear [George Galloway's self-aggrandising polemics](#) without remembering watching the *Observer*'s late, renowned photographer Jane Bown take his portrait many years ago. Jane, then in her 80s, carried her camera in a wicker shopping bag, had no lights, and kept up a running commentary – often fabulously blunt – as she worked. Galloway, a man not lacking in vanity, was disarmed first by her opening remark: "Oh dear, what on earth are we going to do with that face?" Her muttered despair only deepened as Jane looked in vain for an angle that might be at all serviceable. "That face is no good at all." Eventually, she had Galloway lying on the floor, blowing smoke into the air from a fat cigar. "There," she said, finally, with relief. "That's it, there you are. That's you."

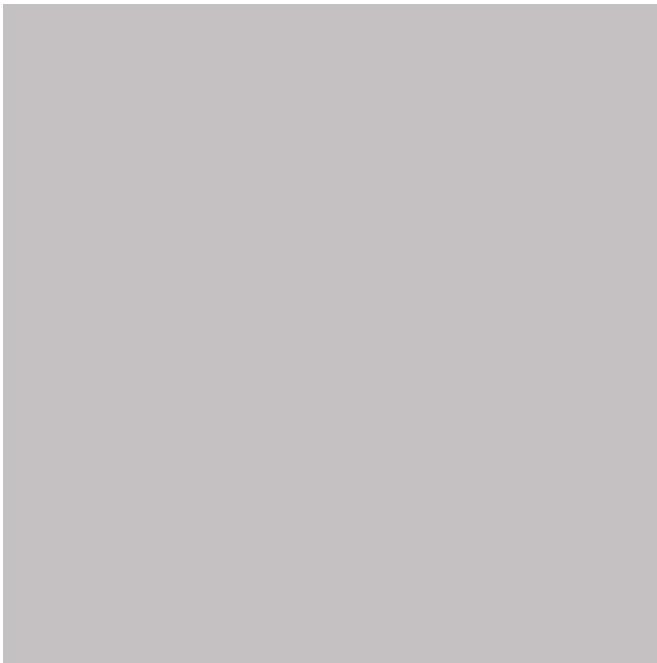
Jack of hearts



Jack Grealish in action against Germany in the Euro 2020 championship.
Photograph: Eddie Keogh - The FA/The FA/Getty Images

I'm not claiming powers of prophecy but just over 12 months ago I sent an email – an embarrassingly heartfelt pitch – to Jonathan Barnett, agent of the footballer Jack Grealish. In it, I set out an idea for a book about the coming year in Grealish's life, in which, I suggested, he would "become the most charismatic and talked-about talent in the English game since Gazza". Grealish had not yet made his international debut, but this would be the inside story of how he became a semi-mythical national talisman. I may have quoted something from *The Tempest*. Barnett sent me a brief note back saying, "I think it's too early for a book about Jack." Watching [Grealish](#) deftly help to dismantle Germany on Tuesday, it was hard not to feel in England's victory, literature's loss.

- Tim Adams in an Observer columnist



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The weekly stats uncoveredVaccines and immunisation

Covid vaccines saved lives in England, but why do estimates differ?

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

Two Public Health England estimates of averted deaths use different approaches



Nurse Sonia Wilson (right) vaccinates 18-year-old Cameron Ladd with the Pfizer vaccine in Doncaster. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Nurse Sonia Wilson (right) vaccinates 18-year-old Cameron Ladd with the Pfizer vaccine in Doncaster. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Sun 4 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Public Health England reported that about [27,000 lives](#) in England have been saved by Covid-19 vaccines, higher than the previous estimate of 10,400 lives. Why are these estimates so different?

These are not statistics in the usual sense; researchers cannot magically count the people who would be dead in parallel universes in which vaccines were not available. They need to build mathematical models of what would have happened in these “counterfactual” worlds.

[‘Grab a jab’: Covid vaccine drop-in centres open across England](#)
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The first approach looked at vaccine take-up and Covid deaths 31 days later in three age groups (60-69, 70-79 and over-80s), and estimated how many more people would have died up to the end of [March 2021](#) had nobody been vaccinated.

This basic analysis considers only the direct effects of vaccination on mortality, but vaccines also have indirect effects through dampening transmission. The PHE/MRC (Medical Research Council) [Biostatistics Unit model](#) is a more complex “transmission dynamics” model, expressing in mathematics how the virus progresses through populations. They use extensive data such as Covid-19 deaths by age and region, and antibody samples, and their model simulates the numbers of infections and deaths without any vaccinations. Up to 19 June, they estimate a reduction in 7.2m infections and 27,200 deaths. Of course, these are comparisons with a rather unreal parallel world – if no vaccines were available, government policies and social reactions would have been different. It’s worth noting that other models estimated locking down a week earlier in March 2020 would have saved more than [20,000 lives](#).

It’s good to explore the same question through competing approaches. Many independent teams come up with different estimates of the [reproduction number R](#), from which a committee has to come to a consensus. We return to George Box’s quote: “All models are wrong; the practical question is how wrong do they have to be to not be useful.” No model will be “correct”, and the quoted uncertainty interval of [26,100-28,400 deaths](#) should be taken with a pinch of salt, as it assumes the model is the truth. While the modelling approaches differ, both methods agree vaccines saved thousands of lives.

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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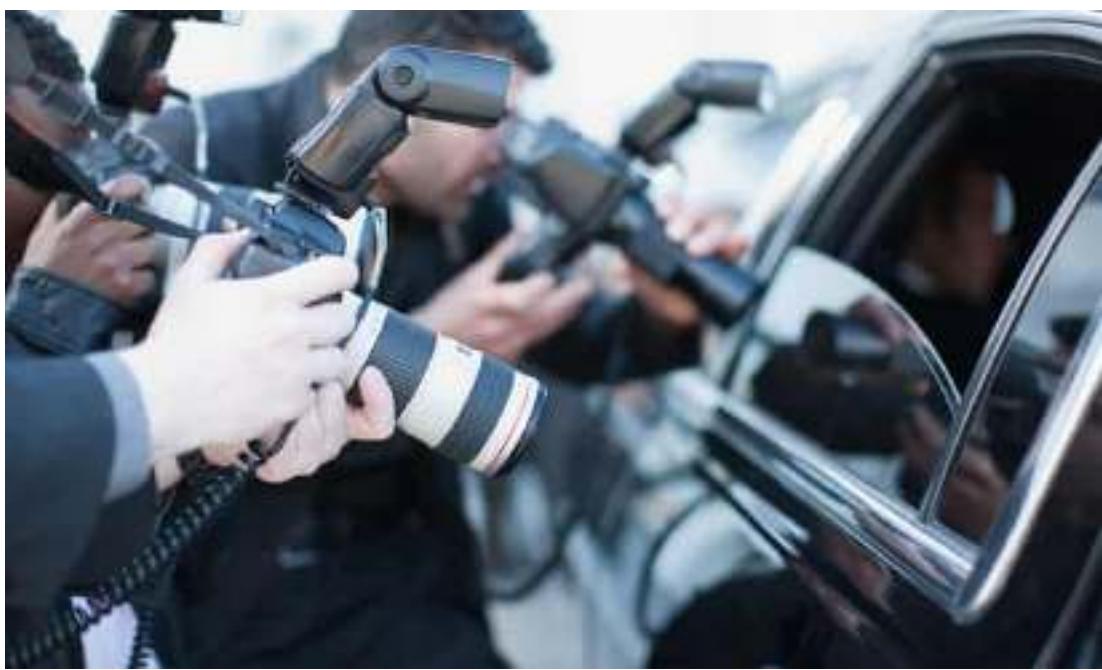
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What's worse? The mobbing of Chris Whitty or stalking a 'betrayed wife'?

Catherine Bennett



Martha Hancock, like many politicians' wives before her, has been left to deal with the scrum



‘Last week’s pursuit suggests that the collective stalking of associated women supplies some measure of very traditional, compensatory sport.’
Photograph: Paul Bradbury/Getty Images

‘Last week’s pursuit suggests that the collective stalking of associated women supplies some measure of very traditional, compensatory sport.’
Photograph: Paul Bradbury/Getty Images

Sat 3 Jul 2021 12.30 EDT

In her 2010 memoir, *Smile Though Your Heart is Breaking*, Pauline Prescott gives a [vivid account](#) of the evening her husband raced home to tell her about his two-year affair. “It’ll be all over the newspapers tomorrow,” he tells her. “‘Who?’ I asked. I felt sick to my stomach. ‘Tracey,’ he replied, his voice breaking. ‘Tracey, in my office.’”

If political sex scandals were losing – even before [Boris Johnson](#) eradicated it – their essential career-ending potential, becoming lethal chiefly in relation to the miscreant’s hypocrisy and corruption, the domestic fallout appears, when compared with earlier survivors’ accounts, still to unfold along historic lines.

The minister is photographed, warned by a newspaper, and left with a few golden hours in which, before the shagging story comes out, to tell the person formerly known as his treasured helpmeet that things were not exactly as they seemed. Vicky Pryce, the ex-wife of Chris Huhne and mother of their three children, [described](#) the efficiency with which, at half-time in the football match she was watching, the then energy minister informed her that her services in his election leaflets (“family matters so much to me”) were no longer required. Pausing to compose his statement – “I am in a serious relationship with Carina Trimingham and I am separating from my wife” – he headed for the gym.

Margaret Cook, hurriedly dumped in a Heathrow departure lounge, asked Robin Cook: “‘What would you do if I went into a deep depression and committed suicide?’ He paused, cool and aloof, as if posed a question on a public platform. ‘I should, of course, be sorry...’”. For recalling this later in

a memoir, along with other disobliging details, she was cast as culpably unforgiving.

But even Cook, she said, arranged some protection. On the street, Martha Hancock did not look like someone much protected on the morning of her forced transformation into a public figure, specifically into an official victim: the object of fascinated pity and unrestrained public speculation – even by people who don’t, as a rule, think they go in for that kind of thing. Hancock-averse contributors to Mumsnet could be found, last week, trying to source his wife’s outfits, admiring the excellent [sunglasses](#), her hair and the dress sense his shitty behaviour had also, by way of a bonus, offered for thorough analysis. Didn’t she, some thought, look just too good, considering? “She knows exactly what she’s doing.”

Back in 2006, [John Prescott](#), too, appears to have redeemed himself a little by attempting – though she was unpersuadable – to spare Pauline her conscription as national tragic turn. “‘You need to pack some things,’ he told me. ‘We’ll go to Dorneywood. The media will be on their way. All hell’s going to break loose.’”

Just as it did when Mrs Hancock, her husband having become the latest idiot to flunk the political marshmallow test, became the available public face of his scandal. First the photographs, next the kind of [glutinous commentary](#) – “Dear Martha”, “a jilted wife writes”, “seeking professional help is advisable” – that passes off intrusion as emotional intelligence. Hancock, though nowhere to be seen, was already rumoured to be intent, with his “serious” replacement relationship, on a quick relaunch, while Mrs Hancock was still, with cameras scrupulously chronicling their own effect, acting proxy target.

And Oliver Tress, Gina Coladangelo’s husband, fellow collateral damage? Was he, too, still wearing his wedding ring? Devastated/bravely styling it out/suspiciously poised – and clearly longing for advice? Therapists were surely eager to remind him, as they have Mrs Hancock, not to burden the children, blame himself, drown his sorrows, and, in the nicest possible way, start “a new relationship any time soon”. But – it’s unclear whether he was considered less captivatingly broken or simply more difficult legally or physically to harass – Tress has been scarcely photographed and considered

similarly ineligible for remote media counselling. These expressions of interest have been all Mrs Hancock's.

Johnson may then have severed the once fruitful connection between personal betrayal (even at his own, pathological level) and political ignominy, but last week's pursuit suggests that the collective stalking of associated women – that is, women lacking the alternative narrative opportunities of, say, a Sarah Vine – supplies at least some measure of very traditional, compensatory sport. Supposing the husband runs away, the wife, regardless of any formal public interest, can still legitimately be monitored over the coming days for signs of humiliation, real or imagined, then later, maybe indefinitely, for evidence of grudge-bearing, useless attempts – long after the man ceased being questioned on his affair/s – at self-liberation. Just recently, publicising her book, Marina Wheeler was still having to insist that Boris Johnson was not her defining feature.

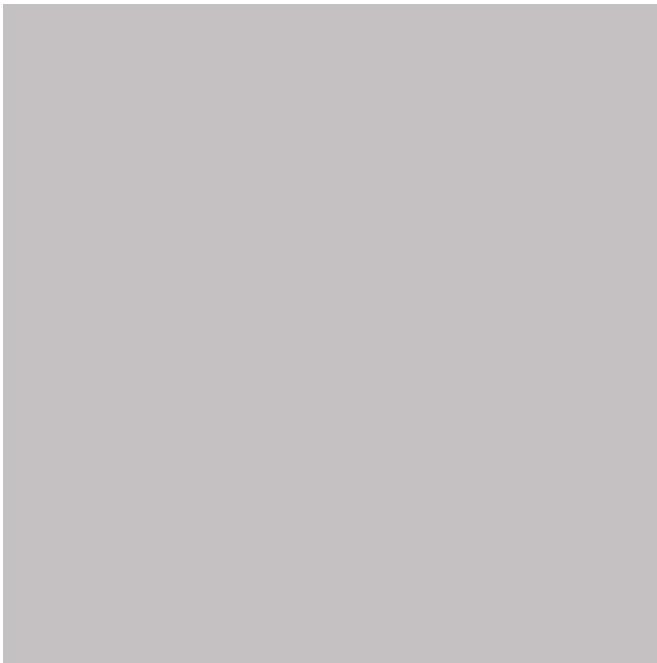
Nor has the arrival, post Leveson, of the Independent Press Standards Organisation's code of conduct (see, re Hancock, clauses 2, 3 and 6) been enough reliably to protect family non-contributors to a politician's disgrace from the sort of mobbing that is now piously deprecated in the case of Diana, Princess of Wales; that, if it were to be inflicted on, say, a respected official by, say, a group of drunk estate agents, would instantly be denounced. Chris Whitty's street molestation, after earlier aggression near his house, prompted justifiable outrage: "Despicable harassment... intimidation on our streets" (Boris Johnson); "appalling and totally unacceptable" (Sajid Javid). "These thugs must be found and charged," said Nadim Zahawi. "Zero tolerance for harassing a public servant." Bright side: nobody describes the monstered Mr Whitty as "humiliated".

As for the "thugs", they were reportedly upset that their high spirits had been unwelcome. "If I made [Prof Whitty] feel uncomfortable, which it does look like I did, then I am sorry to him for that," one said. Not much, but way more gracious than anything Martha Hancock is likely to hear about treatment that her husband – had he ever attempted self-regulation – could easily have predicted from his party's media allies.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[Names in the news](#)[Margot Robbie](#)

Margot Robbie, the all-action heroine making waves for women

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Just like her Birds of Prey character Harley Quinn, the actress is passionate about emancipation



Margot Robbie: ‘The perception that women aren’t interested in action is ridiculous.’ Photograph: Matt Petit/A.M.P.A.S./REX/Shutterstock

Margot Robbie: ‘The perception that women aren’t interested in action is ridiculous.’ Photograph: Matt Petit/A.M.P.A.S./REX/Shutterstock

Sat 3 Jul 2021 10.00 EDT

Appearing on the cover of British *Vogue*, Margot Robbie [explained](#) why she was passionate about getting women involved in action movies. That particular genre is where the big money is in Hollywood, she said. “And then also, the perception that women aren’t interested in action is ridiculous,” she added.

It is a notion that is being proved again and again in the real world, where superhero films led by female characters, often written and directed by women, are making lots of money at the box office. In the grand scheme of things, it remains a ripple, rather than a wave, but every time a *Wonder Woman* or *Black Widow* appears to great fanfare, it feels like a step forward, not least because these franchises are evolving and adapting as time goes on.

Take *Suicide Squad*, the 2016 film in which Robbie first played Harley Quinn. It was a grim, bloated mess and often misogynistic; I hated it so much that I only watched its sequel, *Birds of Prey*, because Robbie produced and it was directed by Cathy Yan. *Birds of Prey* turned out to be a brilliant, joyful surprise, funny and thrilling. Its subtitle, *And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn*, felt apt – the character had been emancipated from the previous film.

After many pandemic-related delays, *Black Widow* is finally out in cinemas and, much like Quinn, Scarlett Johansson’s Natasha Romanoff has endured a complicated history on screen. Last month, Johansson talked about how much her character was sexualised in *Iron Man 2*: “Really talked about like she’s a piece of something, like a possession or a thing or whatever – like a piece of ass,” as she told [Collider](#), and it’s true Black Widow has often felt like an afterthought in even the best movies that feature her. That is not the case in the film that bears the character’s name, and *Black Widow*’s director, Cate Shortland, has spoken eloquently about its themes. “I don’t think you

have to scratch the surface with many women before you get stories about control, or being made to feel uncomfortable because your power is somehow being taken or you feel you don't have a voice," she told the [*Guardian*](#).

I have found a specific sort of catharsis in watching women defeat evil global conspiracies, or fighting their way through alien landscapes, or taking on an army of robots, while blowing things up loudly. From Sarah Connor to Captain Marvel to Ellen Ripley, these women are angry and strong and powerful, and it doesn't take a superhero to work out why that is so appealing.

Elvis Costello's aim is true – rock'n'roll riffs are there to be shared



'Fine by me': Elvis Costello at the Hammersmith Apollo in March 2020.
Photograph: Jim Dyson/Getty Images

Olivia Rodrigo has found an unlikely [supporter](#) in Elvis Costello, who backed the 18-year-old last week against accusations of plagiarism. Part of *Brutal*, which opens Rodrigo's debut album *Sour*, sounds an awful lot like the riff from Costello's Pump It Up.

Costello said that it was “fine by me”. “It’s how rock’n’roll works,” he said, arguing, [via hashtags](#), that Pump It Up was inspired by Bob Dylan’s Subterranean Homesick Blues, which in turn was inspired by Chuck Berry’s Too Much Monkey Business.

It happens all the time, consciously or not. St Vincent told the [BBC](#) that she’d had 12 hours of believing she had “written the best melody there ever was” before realising that the chorus of her own My Baby Wants A Baby bears more than a passing resemblance to 9 To 5 by Sheena Easton. 9 To 5’s songwriter, Florrie Palmer, [gets a credit](#) on the track.

In recent years, the scramble to spot similarities in music has been gruesome, from [the ruling](#) that Robin Thicke and Pharrell’s Blurred Lines infringed on the copyright of Marvin Gaye’s Got To Give It Up because it shared a “vibe”, to [Right Said Fred’s credit](#) on Taylor Swift’s Look What You Made Me Do, owing to rhythmic similarities. Rodrigo herself [credits Swift](#) on 1 Step Forward, 3 Steps Back, after “interpolating” the chords from New Year’s Day.

Costello is an established enough artist to accept the homage – borrowing up is not the same as borrowing down – but one can only hope that this kind of common sense is the start of a course correction, of sorts.

Sky Brown, young Olympian is ready to ‘go big’



Sky Brown will be just 13 when she competes at the Olympic Games in Tokyo. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

On the day it was announced that 12-year-old [Sky Brown](#) would become the youngest summer Olympian ever selected by Team GB, I watched the British teenager [Emma Raducanu](#), 18, advance to the third round of Wimbledon.

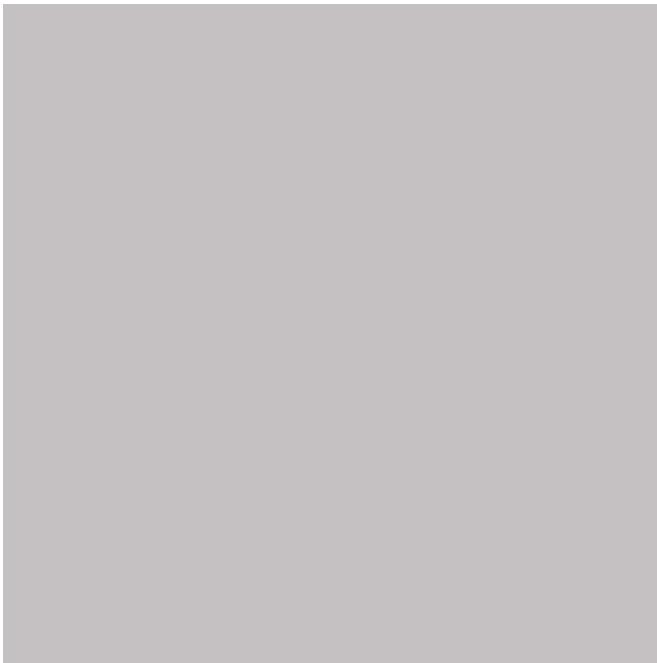
The commentators were near-breathless with talk of the prize money awarded for getting to this stage of the competition, and for the opportunities that funding would offer to Raducanu, in terms of developing her career. As [Coco Gauff](#) continued her first-week march forward, I had to remind myself that Gauff is only 17; that when she first made a splash at Wimbledon, [she was 15](#). These are, or could be, the stars of tomorrow.

Brown, who lives between Japan and the US but has a British father, will be an ancient 13 when she gets to Tokyo, where she will join Britain's first Olympic skateboarding team, along with 14-year-old Bombette Martin. Brown, who famously posted a [horrifying, jaw-dropping video](#) of a 2020 fall in which she fractured her wrist and skull, has [referred to herself](#) as "the little one in there going big". It is a lovely phrase, one that might be taken to heart by more than just these inspirational young women.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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Letters: is it free speech or hate speech?

Gender-critical views can all too easily verge on being anti-trans



Copies of the final edition of Apple Daily in Hong Kong. Photograph: Lam Yik/Reuters

Copies of the final edition of Apple Daily in Hong Kong. Photograph: Lam Yik/Reuters

Sun 4 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

I was saddened to read your editorial on free speech and the right to “gender-critical” views. At what point do gender-critical views swerve into hate-speech? The arguments perpetuated by those espousing these views are often intensely personal, verge on anti-trans and look to deny others their sense of self. In a liberal society, we should of course treasure free speech, but be brave enough to acknowledge the negative impact it can have on marginalised groups and minorities, challenge fear and misinform, and adapt accordingly.

James Wand

Bermondsey, London

Thank you for your commitment to freedom of expression, so vital for press and other media reporting of every issue of public interest (“[Whatever your view on sex and gender, freedom of speech is key](#)”, Editorial). It can’t have escaped your notice that your statement comes at a time when Hong Kong’s independent media is under sustained attack. Preserving the space for

discussion of facts, views and opposing views in line with international human rights law is something to be protected by all who wish to continue to live in a democracy.

Susan Kemp

Edinburgh

Don't panic

As someone who remembers the 1970s, I agreed with William Keegan's relaxed attitude to today's wage/price inflation panic ("[Don't hit the brakes – the recovery is barely out of first gear](#)", Business). What no one mentions is house price inflation, which was not an issue in the 1970s but which today may run at 10% a year and is the major distorter of the economy.

I wonder if Keegan, as a Keynesian, agrees with Galbraith's acerbic attitude to the effect, or otherwise, of changes to the bank rate (which attract so much interest but are usually reactive rather than proactive). The great economist said that central bankers wore conservative tailoring, hung out with the affluent (he might have said effluent in today's world) but that their effect on inflation or recession was practically zilch.

David Redshaw

Gravesend, Kent

Not all over-65s are Tories

Nick Cohen reminds us that the majority of over-65s in England and Wales voted Conservative in 2019 ("[Our politics of nostalgia is a sure sign of present-day decay](#)," Comment). But if 61% of us did, then 39% of us didn't, and that includes pretty well all my relatives and close friends of that generation.

Cohen is quite right to criticise the "assault on the National Trust for telling the truth about slavery and colonialism". He is also right to deplore the pension triple lock. It's an embarrassment, and he forgot to mention the untaxed winter fuel payment, though I suspect most of us send that the way of whichever charity might most irritate the prime minister. We care, too, about Brexit-related job losses, if only for the selfish reason that we need

people to be paying taxes. Finally, we don't have children at school, but we do have many friends and relatives of school age about whose education and future we care deeply.

Yes, we're a minority but, at almost two-fifths, a sizeable one. It would be nice if now and again our existence was acknowledged.

John Filby

Ashover, Derbyshire

Tell Laura I love her

In "A brush with art history", ([Letters](#)), David Prothero recounts his struggle with Laura Cumming's guess the painting, and asks if he's alone. I'm a retired psychologist who failed art O-level. I'm managing to identify a number at first sight and, with a little research, most of the rest. I recommend Workers' Educational Association art history classes. The puzzle is now the first thing I turn to each Sunday. Thank you Laura!

Kevin Sullivan

Hereford

Holding power to account

In his excellent article ("[From Grenfell Tower to the Metropolitan police, shirking responsibility has become endemic](#)", Comment), Kenan Malik overlooked one feature that has allowed the evasion of responsibility that he describes. He mentions that, when asked by the inquiry if he took responsibility for the failures on his watch, Robert Black, the former boss of the organisation that managed Grenfell Tower, answered "[Pass](#)". No proper inquiry should have allowed such an inadequate response to go unchallenged. Similarly, on 10 June, Matt Hancock, then secretary of state for health, said to the Commons health select committee that there had never had a national shortage of PPE. It would be harder to evade responsibility if there were more rigorous challenge from the bodies set up to scrutinise and enforce accountability on the part of public figures and institutions.

Gavin Brown

Manuel, Linlithgow, West Lothian

Hostels: need before profit

Nobody should be surprised by the news that private hostel providers are failing to meet the care needs of their vulnerable residents (“[Hostels from hell](#)”, Special report).

This is because this provision for homeless people is overseen by housing associations, a sector increasingly organised since the 1980s on a business model. The solution is to restore responsibility to local authorities where standards, affordability and the quality of care can be assured.

Dr Charlie Cooper

Nottingham

The many sides of autism

Your article, “[‘We don’t need to be cured or fixed’: writers speak out on autism](#)”, was a manifestation of the privilege that those with high-functioning autism (myself included) enjoy. My autism, by random luck, does not prevent me from taking part in the world of language but there are many autistic people who are utterly unable to communicate, and thus cannot give chatty interviews. Why was there no mention of these voiceless?

To take another example, in the UK, autism is reason enough to deprive someone of their liberty; there are thousands of people whose autism has deprived them of their legal capacity, and who are otherwise detained for their own protection. Do these people not need a cure or treatment, or are they simply to be left to rot?

Like those interviewed, I regard my autism as an asset, but constructing a myth of autistic people as a “model minority”, based on a self-selecting group of high-functioning individuals, is to erase and marginalise the countless people rendered profoundly vulnerable, incapacitated, imprisoned or dead on account of their autism or consequences stemming from it.

Elijah Granet

San Diego, California

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For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 4 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Due to erroneous information supplied by Foundation Earth, an article said its pilot labelling scheme was “based on a system developed by food scientists at Oxford University with support from World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)”. In fact, the system was developed by the sustainability advisory firm Mondra using data from a 2018 report by researchers at

Oxford University and Agroscope. WWF has not been involved ([Food label ‘eco scores’ to help shoppers make greener choice](#), 27 June, page 31).

An article about an open letter from 400 Labour activists to the leader, Keir Starmer, said the authors privately held “a fear of Labour being seen to be too pro-Brexit”; this should have said pro-remain ([Starmer urged to speak out and help millions of EU citizens in Britain](#), 27 June, page 11).

Sharon Graham received 349 branch nominations for the leadership of the Unite union, not 328, as we said ([Female candidate to lead Unite faces ‘disgraceful abuse’](#), 27 June, page 31).

An article said Rule Britannia was played without singing at the Last Night of the Proms in 2020. In fact, the BBC reversed this decision and the words were sung by a small choir ([Everything you wanted to know about the culture wars but were afraid to ask](#), 13 June, page 23).

The one where the wheel came off: a Q&A had David Schwimmer saying he “was a roller-skating waiter in Chicago for seven years”. He worked as a waiter for seven years and one summer the role involved that stunt ([This much I know](#), 20 June, Magazine, page 7).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Sussex Bar & Restaurant, London: ‘There’s an awful lot to like about it’ – restaurant review](#)

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

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I love the football team but can't get tribal about England. What's going on?

[Kenan Malik](#)



So thin is the idea of Englishness that its primary symbol is eleven sportsmen



Fans watch England v Germany in the Uefa European Championship at Wembley Stadium on 29 June. Photograph: Kieran McManus/BPI/REX/Shutterstock

Fans watch England v Germany in the Uefa European Championship at Wembley Stadium on 29 June. Photograph: Kieran McManus/BPI/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 4 Jul 2021 02.30 EDT

Yes, I shouted with joy when [Raheem Sterling](#) scored against Germany last week. I would have been equally joyful had he scored against Scotland. And when India play England in a Test series next month, I will be rooting for England, not for the country of my birth.

When it comes to sport, I am deeply invested in Englishness. But while I am willing to wave the flag in a football stadium or on a cricket field, it remains unwaved in other arenas. I am, as Sunder Katwala and John Denham would snort, a “90-minute Englishman”. Katwala, who runs the thinktank British Future, and Denham, former Labour MP and now director of the Centre for English Identity and Politics at Southampton University, are among the keenest advocates on the left of the need for an English identity. Together with Steve Ballinger, they have published a new pamphlet called “[Beyond a](#)

[90-minute nation](#)”, which argues for “an inclusive England outside the stadium” as well as inside.

There was a time when I wasn’t even a 90-minute Englishman. As a teenager growing up in a viciously racist Britain that often denied me the right to belong, I consciously failed the [Tebbit test](#), refusing to support any British team, still less an English one. Whether in football, cricket or tiddlywinks, it was a case of “anyone but England”.

Today, it’s different. Racism has not disappeared, but the kind of venomous racism that disfigured Britain a generation ago is thankfully relatively rare. The nature of Britishness and Englishness has changed, too. According to British Future, few white people would now have a problem thinking of someone like me as English. Only around one in 10 insist on it being a racially exclusive identity. As for ethnic minorities, fewer than one in five feel that Englishness is still the preserve of white people. Traditionally, minorities have identified themselves more as “British” than as “English”. That gap is closing, British Future suggests, and many feel both British and English.

I have long since lost my “anyone but England” attitude. I, too, now feel the pain of an Ashes defeat, the joy of a football victory over Germany. But can I see myself as being more than a “90-minute Englishman”? Could I be a 24/7 Englishman?

Tribalism is an intimate part of sport. Certainly, sport is about skill and prowess, determination and strength. It’s about Mo Salah’s dancing feet, Roger Federer’s sublime forehand, [Dina Asher-Smith’s lightning speed](#). But it’s also about rivalries and conflicts, both individual and team. Liverpool v Manchester United, Federer v Nadal, Britain’s Asher-Smith in an [Olympic showdown](#) with Jamaica’s Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce: these are what give sport its soul and its drama, encasing individual achievement within a wider story that belongs as much to the spectator as to the athlete.

But sport generates a kind of tribalism I would not wish to replicate outside the stadium. It is fierce and unforgiving, a loyalty that bears no rational scrutiny. I might wish England to trounce Scotland in football (sorry, Andy Robertson) but beyond the game, I would not pose English interests as

necessarily different to those of Scotland, nor wish to think of policy along such divisive lines.

The conservative philosopher, the late Roger Scruton, argued that “who are we?” is a “question that the English never needed to ask themselves” because [“they instinctively knew who they were”](#). England was simply “home”. But home can have many meanings, and be forbidding as well as welcoming. According to Scruton, recent immigrants were “not really Englishmen at all, but people who had become British, by a strange process which overcame the unnaturalness [of] foreigners”. “Disquiet about immigration” was inevitable because of “the disruption of an old experience of home”.

Leftwing advocates of Englishness, such as Katwala and Denham, reject such a vision, of course, and define Englishness by its inclusivity, viewing it as a “civic identity”, necessary to build a “political community”. An identity, though, has to be more than just “inclusive”. A striking aspect of much of the contemporary debate is the paucity of discussion of what Englishness is, beyond its diversity.

This is partly the product of the way the debate has arisen, largely through the erosion of British identity. As the Scots and the Welsh have developed their identities and gained their own legislatures, many in England have felt a loss of power and control over their lives. This, as the Brexit debate has revealed, is part of long-simmering resentment of the “metropolitan elite” and of being abandoned by mainstream political parties, particularly Labour. Englishness has arisen not because of a positive movement to adopt the identity, but from scepticism towards and scorn for other forms of collective belonging.

Englishness has arisen not because of a positive movement ... but from scepticism and scorn for other forms of belonging

It’s this thinness of Englishness that has made football its primary symbol. The British Future poll shows that the England football team far outranks anything else as an image of an inclusive Englishness. As it does in much of the political debate.

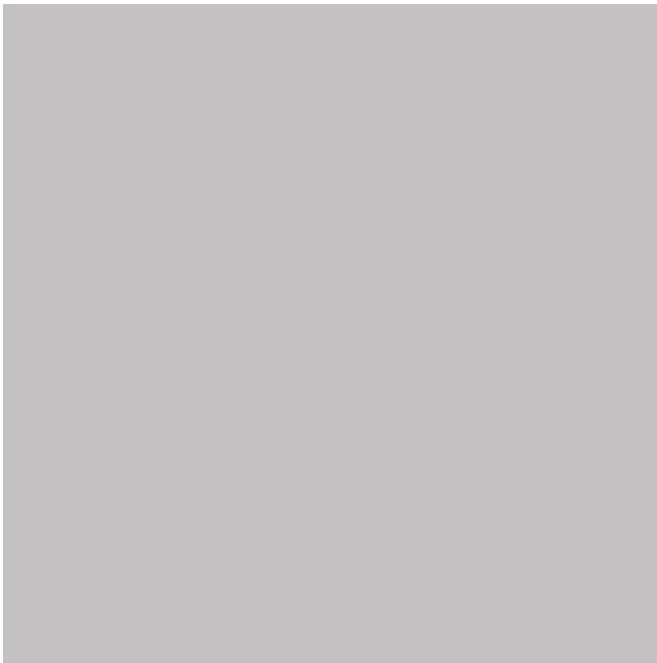
“The imagined nation of millions seems more real than as a team of 11 named people,” Eric Hobsbawm wrote, a line that Katwala quotes in his essay, to emphasise the importance of football to Englishness. It’s worth reading the whole passage from which the quote comes (it’s in his book *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*). Hobsbawm was describing the rise of nationalist fervour in Europe in the interwar years, and the use of sport by the authorities to bridge the public and private spheres and “make national symbols part of the life of every individual”.

Hobsbawm asks why so many were drawn to this project. A large part of the answer, he suggests, is that it “filled the void left by failure, impotence and the apparent inability of other ideologies, political projects and programmes to realise men’s hopes”. That was true then, and it is true now. John Denham may be right about the [need for an English parliament](#). But no separate legislature, no sense of Englishness, will assuage the feeling of abandonment and loss of control that pervades much of politics in England. That requires a different kind of political project.

I will cheer on England with fervour and fury. But after those 90 minutes are up, my Englishness will fade into the background. I am tribal about sport, not about the nation.

- Kenan Malik is a Observer columnist
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[Opinion](#)[George Galloway](#)

The ugly side of Batley's byelection shows the perils of rainbow coalitions

[Nick Cohen](#)



Labour can't allow itself to be swayed by interest groups that run against its values



George Galloway after his defeat by Kim Leadbeater. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

George Galloway after his defeat by Kim Leadbeater. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Sat 3 Jul 2021 14.00 EDT

I don't want to be priggish. I accept that when you are fighting the fascistic you have to win and not be too picky about how you do it. But [Labour's victory](#) over George Galloway in Batley and Spen should make you wonder how a centre-left party can ever win back national power.

The great realignment of politics across the west is meant to have left the left with one option: building a “rainbow coalition” of liberal graduates, ethnic minority voters, grateful for the educated’s opposition to racism, and all other victims of prejudice and discrimination. The US civil rights leader Jesse Jackson ran with the [rainbow coalition slogan](#) in the 1980s, as he tried to secure the Democratic nomination. He failed but offered the hope that eventually “the desperate, the damned, the disinherited, the disrespected, and the despised” would come together and win. Not today: the rainbow coalition is a coalition of losers now, whose members are too concentrated in the cities to beat a right that can win in constituencies across the country. But one day. Surely.

Or perhaps not, unless the centre-left can work out what to do when the colours of the rainbow clash. I called George Galloway fascistic. Even now there are many who find the plain use of language disconcerting. Galloway came from the left, they say, but then so did Oswald Mosley. He led the demonstrations against the Iraq war of 2003, and those who marched behind him either did not know or did not care that he had addressed Saddam Hussein as “sir” and “saluted” him in 1994 after the dictator’s genocidal campaign against Iraq’s (largely Muslim) Kurdish minority. He went on to praise the “reforming zeal” of the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, as Vladimir Putin waged war on the (largely Muslim) Syrian population.

In Batley and Spen, he said his aim was to topple the “Zionist” Keir Starmer. With a weary inevitability, he then had to sack one of his aides who was exposed as a denier of the Nazi extermination of European Jewry, while a group of Galloway’s supporters organised an intimidatory and homophobic campaign against the Labour candidate, Kim Leadbeater.

The colours of the rainbow have never been on display in his career. Just the red and brown of the old pact between far left and far right. The tongue-tied embarrassment might once have been shame about allying with such a man. But most on the centre-left have seen through Galloway by now. Rather the embarrassment comes because Galloway appealed to largely Muslim voters, who are meant to be a happy part of the rainbow coalition of the oppressed. Not exclusively. The white far left, in the form of the Socialist Workers party, and the Corbynites were Galloway’s eager helpers, and the Batley and Spen results suggest his anti-LGBT stance may have attracted the votes of white conservatives.

But it remains clear that a demagogic party that is conspiracist, culturally rightwing and radical in its opposition to a carefully selected list of oppressive regimes did well with a section of the Muslim vote. Just as a culturally conservative but economically leftwing party would probably do well with a section of white voters, as Boris Johnson appears to half grasp.

People don’t want to call Galloway fascistic because it would imply his supporters backed a foul thug. The notion that the far right can only ever be a white party explains part of it. As does the fear that the statement “some

“Muslims vote for extremists” will be rapidly turned into “all Muslims are extremists”.

In any case, Leadbeater faced down a hate-filled campaign and her victory honoured her murdered sister, who [supported the White Helmet movement](#) that tried to save the victims of the murderous assaults of Assad. The Conservative party from Johnson down hoped to benefit from Galloway’s abuse of Labour and went absent without leave from the fight against him.

The Conservative party hoped to benefit from Galloway’s abuse of Labour and went absent without leave to fight him

Criticising [Labour](#) in these circumstances feels stingy. Yet, when a country faces Conservative rule for as far ahead as anyone can see, criticisms must be made.

Labour might have explained to conservative Muslims that Starmer’s [policy on Israel](#) was no different in theory to Jeremy Corbyn’s: a two-state solution. The change that Galloway and many on the far left cannot abide is that the [conspiracy theories that accompanied Corbynism](#) have gone. If Muslim voters had still stuck with Galloway after that, Labour would then have had no option but to shrug and move on.

Instead, Labour issued [leaflets denouncing the Tories](#) as the friends of Narendra Modi, and the enemies of the oppressed Muslims of Kashmir. As Labour MPs with Indian minorities in their constituencies told me, the effect was instant. Their inboxes filled with complaints that Labour was running on an anti-Indian ticket.

An effort to placate one part of the rainbow coalition succeeded only in alienating another.

The traditional objection to identity politics is that they deny individuality. They do, but the argument does not always hold. If individuals become convinced that a party hates them because of their real or perceived identity, they strengthen that identity and fight back. The Conservatives did not fail to attract black and Asian voters for a generation after Enoch Powell’s “rivers

of blood” speech because they opposed its monetarism. Nine out of 10 Jewish voters did not refuse to vote for Labour under Corybn because they liked privatised railways. Both saw political movements that appeared to despise them and reacted accordingly.

The thinktank British Future once suggested that Labour at its best is a “bridging party”. It had integrated the working class and postwar Commonwealth immigrants into British politics. It should carry on encouraging all groups to exercise their democratic right to make their cases, and then judge which causes to adopt against its values.

A party that acts as a bridge is the opposite of the closed parties of politicians as superficially different as Galloway and Trump. But it is not a rainbow coalition. It does not pretend that there are no conflicts of values and interests, and no need for hard decisions because every group it hopes to yank together is by definition living in harmony.

A recognition of the need to make choices would be a welcome advance. The trouble with rainbows is that they fill the sky with shimmering beauty for a moment and then vanish as if they were never there.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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Nine in 10 parents in England approve of Covid jabs for children, survey finds

ONS survey comes as member of Sage suggests there is not enough evidence to back vaccinating children

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A temporary vaccination centre at Arsenal FC's Emirates Stadium in north London last week. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

A temporary vaccination centre at Arsenal FC's Emirates Stadium in north London last week. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

[Richard Adams](#), [Matthew Weaver](#) and [Linda Geddes](#)

Thu 1 Jul 2021 10.50 EDT

Almost nine in 10 parents in England say they favour giving their children a Covid vaccine if they are offered it, according to a national survey released by the [Office for National Statistics](#).

The survey of more than 4,400 parents with children under 16 and attending school found 88% said they would definitely or probably agree to vaccinate their child, with just 12% saying they would not favour vaccination.

The survey was conducted in April and May, before the [Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was given approval](#) by the UK medicines regulator for children aged 12 to 15 at the start of June. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is expected to advise the government later this summer on whether to allow children over 12 to be vaccinated.

Prof Anthony Harnden, deputy chair of the JCVI, told the BBC: “JCVI are very aware of the issues surrounding both the pros and the cons of vaccinating their children, which we will talk about in due course, but actually what we need to be absolutely sure is that these vaccines benefit children in some way ... so we are looking at this data very carefully.”

But Prof Calum Semple, a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), said not enough was known about possible side-effects if children were given Covid jabs.

“Vaccines are safe but not entirely risk-free. We are aware in adults about clots, and there’s some safety data from America showing rare heart problems associated with some of the vaccines. So until that data is really complete for children, I’m not persuaded that the risk benefit for children has been clarified,” Semple told the BBC, speaking in a personal capacity.

He added: “There’s very nuanced debate going on here but at the moment I don’t think there’s enough evidence to support vaccinating children.”

The debate over vaccinating children comes amid concern at the growing number of cases [affecting school attendance in England](#), including 330,000 pupils absent in self-isolation last week, as the Delta variant continues to spread.

Gavin Williamson, the education secretary for England, has said he wants to [end the use of self-isolation](#) for pupils who have had close contact with a

confirmed Covid case within school bubbles, while the prime minister's spokesperson on Wednesday implied headteachers were being too quick to send pupils home.

But school leaders reacted angrily, saying they were following the rules laid down by the government and Public [Health](#) England that mandate self-isolation.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said in a letter to Boris Johnson: "We are dismayed by media reports that Downing Street appears to be suggesting that schools are being overzealous in their interpretation of government guidance on the management of Covid cases and that they are sending home too many pupils.

"This feels like a cynical attempt to shift the blame for your government's failure to address the escalating educational disruption of recent weeks on to schools at a time when they are working under extraordinarily difficult circumstances to manage this deteriorating situation."

Prof Russell Viner of the University College London institute of child health and former president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said the system of self-isolation for close contacts of positive cases within a school bubble had been "highly effective".

Speaking at the Royal Society of Medicine (RSM) on Thursday, Viner said teenagers and children would become the primary source of infection for vulnerable individuals once most adults had been double-jabbed.

"Once vaccine supply is less of an issue and we have adequate safety data, my personal belief is that we should be vaccinating our teenagers at the same time as contributing towards international supply," Viner said.

"Vaccinating all the adults has changed the dynamics of this pandemic. That's one of the reasons, in my mind, that we should think about vaccinating [teenagers and children]."

Viner said the question of whether to vaccinate younger children under the age of 12 was a separate one, with little available safety data on the use of Covid-19 vaccines for that age group. “Young children have quite different immune responses to even older adolescents and adults, and that I think counsels caution,” Viner said.

[One in 20 children missed school in England due to Covid as cases rise 66%](#)
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The ONS survey found parents with children at secondary school were the most enthusiastic for vaccines, with 53% saying they would definitely support vaccination and just 4% saying they definitely would not. Nearly 35% of parents said they were “unsure but probably yes” in favour.

Among the parents of primary school-age children, 43% were definitely in favour and 46% were “unsure but probably yes” in favour of vaccination. Just 3% said they were “definitely” opposed, while a little more than 7% were recorded as “unsure but probably no”.

According to the ONS, the most common reasons given by parents opposed to vaccination were that not enough research had been done, or they wanted more information about long-term side-effects or had concerns over vaccine safety.

Barton said vaccinating pupils had “great potential to reduce educational disruption” but that the wait for the JCVI’s decision was frustrating: “We need to know whether or not it can be factored in as a potential solution because that then informs how we proceed in terms of other Covid control measures.”

Even though the risks to children and teenagers from catching Covid are very low, they are not entirely absent, said Prof Beate Kampmann, the director of the Vaccine Centre at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, also addressing the RSM. “We have also seen the evolution of long Covid in children. It’s a rare condition but it can also be very debilitating,” Kampmann said.

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Coronavirus

Scientists urge UK to expand official list of Covid symptoms

UK's narrow clinical definition only includes high fever, continuous cough, or loss of smell and taste

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Prof Jon Deeks said that broadening the symptoms list would increase demand on testing, but it would be worthwhile if it led to earlier detection of cases. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Prof Jon Deeks said that broadening the symptoms list would increase demand on testing, but it would be worthwhile if it led to earlier detection of cases. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Ian Sample Science editor
@iansample

Wed 30 Jun 2021 19.01 EDT

Senior scientists have called for the UK to expand its official list of Covid symptoms to reduce the number of missed cases and ensure more people know they should self-isolate.

The researchers, who include Prof Calum Semple, a member of the government's Sage committee of experts, argue the UK's narrow clinical definition of Covid leads to delays in identifying people with the disease and may miss them altogether, hampering efforts to disrupt the spread of the virus.

Writing in the [British Medical Journal](#), Semple, of the University of Liverpool, along with Dr Alex Crozier at UCL and others describe how Covid patients do not always experience the official UK symptoms of a high fever, a new continuous cough, or a loss of sense of smell or taste early on, or at any time in the course of the disease.

“To reopen society with greater speed and fairness, control of transmission must improve,” they write. “This starts with an expanded and more context appropriate case definition and rests on adaptive, locally grounded, and information-led public health responses.”

While the UK lists only three symptoms for Covid, the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists 11](#) and the [World Health Organization lists 13](#). The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control describe a range of symptoms associated with mild-to-moderate Covid-19, the most common being headache, weakness or tiredness, muscle aches, runny nose, appetite loss and sore throat.

Many of these “unofficial” symptoms appear sooner and are more common in young, unvaccinated people who are more likely to pass on the virus, the scientists note.

The researchers concede that expanding the number of symptoms people should look for before taking a test is likely to increase demand for testing and the number who self-isolate. But testing people based on a broader combination of symptoms could spot more cases sooner without putting an unbearable strain on testing capacity, they claim.

Dr Alexander Edwards, associate professor in biomedical technology at the University of Reading, said the scientists raised a valid point about how best to spot cases in the community.

“Many of the symptoms are very common and the best way to judge the likelihood of someone having Covid is a combination of symptoms, their risk of exposure, plus testing. Self-reporting symptoms is especially difficult because even the words we use can be interpreted differently,” he said.

“Spotting people who are infected is just part of the story, however, because unless you can effectively support infected individuals to isolate from others and thereby break the chain of infection, testing alone doesn’t reduce the burden of this disease.”

Jon Deeks, professor of biostatistics at the University of Birmingham, said that while broadening the official symptoms list would increase demand on testing, it would be worthwhile if it led to earlier detection of cases and a good reduction in the number of people spreading it.

“Lateral flow tests are not provided to test people who present with Covid-19 symptoms, but there are many reports on social media of individuals resorting to using them when they are unwell, but not with the key symptoms,” he said.

“They are not well suited as they often fail to identify early stages of infection as they cannot detect low viral loads common at this time. To reduce disease spread, it continues to be important that all those at high risk of infection, which includes many with these symptoms, can access PCR testing as quickly as possible, which requires these changes to be made.”

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[Coronavirus](#)

Covid: surge in Scottish cases raises Euro 2020 safety concerns

Public Health Scotland data shows 1,991 people who later tested positive had attended one or more Euro 2020 events

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Nearly two-thirds of cases reported travelling to London for a Euro 2020 event, including 397 people who were at Wembley for the England v Scotland fixture on 18 June. Photograph: Facundo Arrizabalaga/AP

Nearly two-thirds of cases reported travelling to London for a Euro 2020 event, including 397 people who were at Wembley for the England v Scotland fixture on 18 June. Photograph: Facundo Arrizabalaga/AP

[Heather Stewart](#), [Libby Brooks](#) and [Linda Geddes](#)

Thu 1 Jul 2021 02.05 EDT

Pressure is mounting on ministers to reassure the public about the safety of hosting the final stages of [Euro 2020](#) and other major events after almost 1,300 Scotland fans tested positive for Covid after travelling to London for a match.

Data published by Public Health Scotland on Wednesday [showed](#) that 1,991 people who later tested positive had attended one or more Euro 2020 events during their infection period, a time when they “may have unknowingly transmitted their infection to others”.

Nearly two-thirds of cases reported travelling to London for a Euro 2020 event, including 397 people who were at Wembley for the England v

[Scotland](#) fixture on 18 June – 15% of the 2,600 [Scotland](#) fans given tickets for the match, which ended in a goalless draw.

The news came as 26,068 positive test results were reported across the UK on Wednesday, with 3,887 in Scotland – the highest daily total north of the border since the start of the pandemic.

Downing Street stressed that case numbers were only one of the metrics the government was monitoring, however, as the vaccination programme continues to weaken the link with hospitalisations and deaths.

But given strict [10-day self-isolation rules](#), the sharp increase in cases across the UK is already playing havoc with businesses and schools, as groups of staff and [bubbles of pupils](#) are forced out of workplaces and classrooms after coming into contact with a single coronavirus case.

After the publication of the Scottish data, Prof Stephen Reicher, of the University of St Andrews, a member of the Sage subcommittee advising the government on behavioural science, asked: “Will this year’s Euros be last year’s ‘eat out to help out’ on steroids?”

[England fans in UK can’t go to Rome for Euros quarter-final due to Covid rules](#)

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Prof Christina Pagel, director of the clinical operational research unit at University College London, said the news might explain the gender gap in Scottish cases, which was already suspected to be due to communal watching of the Euro football championships.

“I humbly suggest that this is perhaps more relevant evidence of the impact of big (televised) events on both attendees and watchers, than the small phase 1 government studies,” she wrote on Twitter.

Phase 1 of an official trial of mass events was [published](#) last week, and gave an upbeat assessment of the risks. But experts have pointed out that many of the events were held before the highly transmissible Delta variant took hold.

The England-Scotland match was held with a crowd of 22,500. Wembley is set to welcome 60,000 fans for the tournament's semi-finals next week, and the final on 11 July.

Downing Street said the government would continue to study the data, but the remaining Euro 2020 matches would go ahead as planned.

“Everyone that will be attending the semi-final or the final – or indeed that were watching at Wembley [on Tuesday] night – were taking part in an events research programme that required strict entry requirements including negative tests or full vaccination. And that’s the approach we’ll be using going forward and obviously the results of those pilots will be kept under review.”

But Reicher tweeted: “By opening games to 60,000 fans without any mention of risk, they send a message to 60 million fans at home that the danger has gone away, that it is safe to embrace anyone whether during the game … or indeed at any time. And so, at a time when the race between vaccination and infection is so delicately poised, we create the potential for spreader events in virtually every household.”

The “eat out to help out” scheme, launched by the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, last summer as the government sought to encourage the public back into hospitality venues, was subsequently blamed for an increase in cases as the second wave of the virus took hold.

News of the high number of football fans who have tested positive came at a delicate moment, as ministers prepare to make the final decisions about whether to press ahead with allowing mass events from 19 July, when the last Covid restrictions are expected to be lifted in England.

Sajid Javid, the new health secretary, has already made clear he would like to see as many constraints on normal life as possible removed, in contrast with the more cautious tone on reopening struck by his predecessor, Matt Hancock, who resigned at the weekend.

When Javid was asked about whether scenes of celebrating football fans sent the right message amid rising cases, he stressed that the link between cases and hospitalisation is increasingly being broken.

“Sadly we are seeing a rise in cases. But if you look at hospitalisation and deaths, it is very very sad to see, and no one wants to see that, but we do seem to be doing the most important thing with the vaccine, which is trying to break that link between having a case of the virus and then hospitalisation and that is what is going to help us return life back to normal,” he said.

“We all want to see this nightmare come to an end and that means get out there and get your vaccines.”

Several ministers have underlined that they are keen to see the end of mask wearing, with Sunak saying he would stop wearing his “as soon as possible”.

Boris Johnson has suggested there is a “good chance” of being able to ditch the 1 metre-plus distancing rule, in another sign the government is minded to be much more laissez-faire after 19 July.

And government sources suggest plans for “Covid certificates”, that would involve members of the public being forced to show their vaccine status or evidence of a negative test before entering a mass event, have been ditched. Ministers feared they would be unable to win MPs’ backing for the plans, which many Conservative backbenchers regard as an unacceptable infringement of civil liberties.

Euro 2020 matches are being hosted in London as part of a pilot programme which has included everything from club nights to spectator sports.

Thousands of ticketless Scotland fans travelled down to London on 18 June despite warnings from the Scottish first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, to stay at home.

It is unclear whether they contracted the virus while in England or were already carrying it before their arrival. No data has yet been published about England fans attending the match.

Under the terms of hosting the Euros matches, about 2,500 football officials and sponsor representatives were allowed to travel to the UK without having to quarantine, although ministers said they would have to take daily Covid tests and would be restricted to official hotels and transport.

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Coronavirus

NHS GPs giving second Covid jabs just three weeks apart

Exclusive: UK's vaccines authority issues rebuke amid concerns over health postcode lottery in England

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A health worker administers a Pfizer vaccine at Adwick Leisure Centre, in Doncaster. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

A health worker administers a Pfizer vaccine at Adwick Leisure Centre, in Doncaster. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Denis Campbell](#) and [Jim Waterson](#)

Wed 30 Jun 2021 14.21 EDT

Hundreds of GPs are administering second Covid jabs just three weeks after the first in defiance of [NHS](#) advice, triggering a rebuke from the UK's

vaccines authority.

The rollout of second doses up to nine weeks earlier than official guidance – as well as instances of vaccines distributed to 16- and 17-year-olds – has prompted concern over a postcode lottery in access to protection against coronavirus.

GP vaccinators, high street pharmacies and some mass vaccination centres and pop-up jab clinics in different parts of England have taken the decision to offer second doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab after three weeks and of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine after four weeks, the Guardian has established.

Doctors say their unofficial and “pragmatic” policy of shorter gaps between doses is boosting the immunisation drive ahead of what has been dubbed “Freedom Day” on 19 July and ensures vaccines are not wasted, especially amid the spread of the Delta variant.

An NHS source in London said: “GPs and health centres … they are doing what they want. They are giving Pfizer jabs 21 days apart even though with Pfizer it’s meant to be a 12-week delay. People are bending the rules laid down by NHS England. People won’t admit it but on the ground people are breaking the rules.”

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), which advises the government, warned that people who were double vaccinated sooner than the rules allowed could end up being less protected against Covid.

Prof Wei Shen Lim, the chair of Covid-19 immunisation at the JCVI, said: “The JCVI advises that preferably the second dose of currently approved Covid-19 vaccines should be given eight to 12 weeks after the first dose. The latest evidence indicates that a longer dose interval of eight to 12 weeks is likely to provide higher levels of protection than a shorter dose interval of three to four weeks.”

Many other countries operate shorter gaps between doses than the 12-week delays in the UK. The gaps were originally due to be three weeks for the Pfizer jab and four for Astra Zeneca but early in the vaccine rollout NHS

England ordered all the vaccinations to be given 12 weeks apart, amid concern that supplies might run worryingly low otherwise.

A spokesperson for BMA, the doctors' trade union, said: "The vaccines are both licensed for shorter intervals – 21 days for Pfizer – and other countries are delivering them with shorter intervals. We believe it is right that no vaccines are wasted."

Evidence is emerging that under-18s in some parts of London have already starting receiving their first doses even though the NHS has not yet given the green light for that age group to be jabbed. Teenagers aged 17 and in some cases 16 have been getting jabs in the boroughs of Enfield, Hounslow and Brent despite not having an underlying condition or living with someone who does.

The trend towards people getting their second dose as early as 21 days after their first is being driven in part by young people who want to get double vaccinated as soon as possible, in part so they can go on holiday to [countries that will allow quarantine-free entry](#) with proof of that status, including Portugal. They are using social media platforms such as Reddit and Twitter to find vaccination sites they believe are dispensing second jabs that quickly.

Last weekend thousands of young Londoners turned up at [pop-up vaccination centres](#) at the Science Museum and Arsenal's Emirates Stadium after staff on the doors there made clear that they would accept anyone who had had their first jab more than 21 days earlier.

Despite the JCVI's concern, the NHS Confederation and the British Medical Association defended the right of family doctors to use their judgment to ensure that vaccines were not thrown away.

Ruth Rankine, the director of primary care at the NHS Confederation, said: "We are aware that some vaccination centres may be giving second doses before the recommended minimum eight-week limit, but we also understand the reasons. Some sites may have excess supply that would otherwise go to waste, while others may be coming to the end of their [involvement in the vaccination] programme and have taken a pragmatic approach to use up vaccines rather than waste them."

Rankine and the BMA said GPs were justified in using only three and four-week delays because Public [Health](#) England's own "Green Book" guidance drawn up last year endorsed those timescales. Family doctors run about 1,200 of the 2,000 vaccination sites across England.

"It may be that, as per the Public Health England guidance last year in respect of minimum timescales, sites may be using every opportunity they can to ensure that as many people as possible get vaccinated," added Rankine.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/gps-giving-second-covid-jabs-just-three-weeks-apart-despite-nhs-guidance>

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Pregnancy

Pregnant women in England denied mental health help because of Covid

In 2020-21, only 31,261 out of 47,000 managed to access perinatal mental health services



Up to one in five women have perinatal mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and other conditions. Photograph: Valmedia/Alamy

Up to one in five women have perinatal mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and other conditions. Photograph: Valmedia/Alamy

Sarah Marsh

@sloumarsh

Thu 1 Jul 2021 01.01 EDT

Thousands of pregnant women in England were denied vital help for their mental health because of the pandemic, analysis from leading psychiatrists shows.

In 2020-21, 47,000 were expected to access perinatal mental health services to help with conditions such as anxiety and depression during or after giving birth, but only 31,261 managed to get help in the most recent data for the 2020 calendar year only, according to analysis from the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Up to one in five women have perinatal mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety and other conditions occurring during pregnancy or in the first year after the birth of a child.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists found that the pandemic was not the sole reason the mental health of thousands of women was overlooked. Variation in care across the country due to lack of local investment in perinatal mental health services meant that in many areas in England pregnant women and new others cannot get support.

Trudi Seneviratne, a registrar of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said: “Staff in perinatal mental healthcare have made every effort to support women in these extremely challenging times but services have been under unprecedented strain. Funding for mental health facilities is long overdue but is more urgent in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Vicki Nash, head of policy, campaigns and public affairs at Mind, said the findings were “deeply concerning”.

“More broadly, women are among several groups that have borne the brunt of the Covid crisis with many juggling caring roles with working and home schooling, leading to a deterioration in women’s mental wellbeing,” she said.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is calling for funding in the next spending review. Psychiatrists are also calling on local health bosses in certain areas to address longstanding funding issues.

Perinatal mental health support was broadly on track before the pandemic. In 2019-20, 30,625 women accessed perinatal mental health services, against the expectation of 32,000 outlined in the NHS long term plan.

In all local areas in England, at least 7.1% of pregnant women and new mothers are expected to need support from mental health services. North central London is the worst performing area in the country with just 150 out of 1,521 pregnant women or new mothers expected to access specialist support, managing to get it.

Leanne Howlett, 34, experienced postnatal depression after her first child was born five years ago and had similar problems when her baby daughter was born in 2019. However, this time as she was struggling with her mental health and her daughter turned five-months-old, the pandemic also struck.

“Before coronavirus I had a nurse coming to see me weekly at home and a psychiatrist appointment, and then overnight all these face-to-face meetings switched to phone calls,” Howelett said, adding that it was harder to talk about big issues such as having suicidal thoughts remotely.

She also lost the support of friends and family, and her son could no longer go into nursery, leaving her feeling alone. “Suddenly I felt really on my own with it all, even though support was there, it was not the same.”

Howlett said she worried that services would now permanently move to being provided via telephone calls, saying more funding was needed. She also worries about cuts to health visitors, noting that it is often during these appointments that mothers “reach out” and “ask for help”.

“It is at the weighing clinic [when the baby is weighed after birth] that women reach out. I would not have picked up a phone to get help and if there is no weighing clinics then new mothers are not seeing professionals face to face after having baby,” she added.

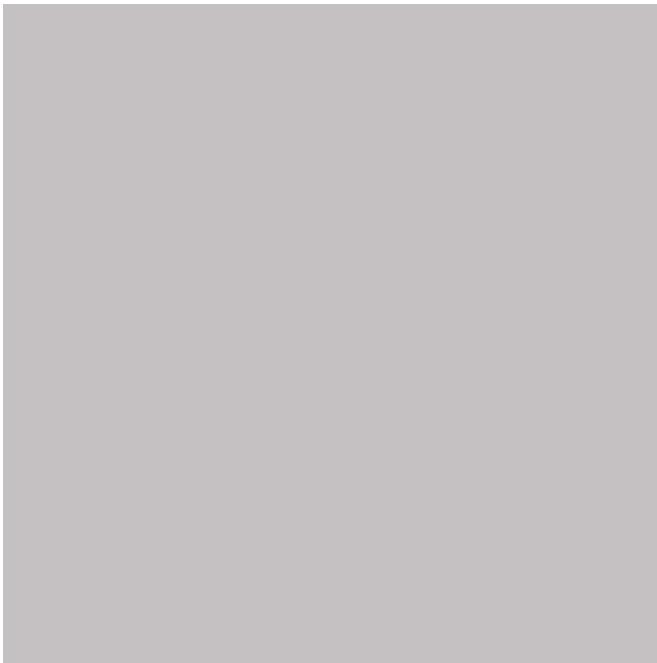
An NHS spokesperson said: “We have already ensured that there is a specialist perinatal mental health service everywhere in the country, and as part of our Long Term Plan will continue to expand, so that at least 66,000 women will be able to access specialist care every year by 2023-24.

“This expansion includes the recently-announced hubs bringing together maternity services, reproductive health, and psychological therapy under one

roof for women who have mental health needs as a result of their maternity experience.”

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Thailand

Phuket reopens to tourists one year after Covid forced Thai borders to close

Scheme requires tourists to stay on island for 14 days if they wish to travel elsewhere in Thailand

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Airport officials wait while a plane carrying the first foreign tourists arrives as Phuket reopens to overseas tourists. Photograph: Jorge Silva/Reuters

Airport officials wait while a plane carrying the first foreign tourists arrives as Phuket reopens to overseas tourists. Photograph: Jorge Silva/Reuters

[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) South-east Asia correspondent

Thu 1 Jul 2021 03.45 EDT

The Thai island of Phuket has reopened to some foreign tourists, more than one year after the pandemic forced the country's borders to close,

devastating the economy.

About 400 international tourists were expected to arrive in Phuket on Thursday, through a scheme that officials hope could help to revive the country's tourism sector.

The programme, known as Phuket Sandbox, aims to minimise the risk of transmission by requiring tourists to stay on the island for 14 days if they wish to travel elsewhere in [Thailand](#).

Phuket residents have been prioritised for vaccination before the reopening, and [at least 70% of the population have received one dose](#) of either Sinovac or AstraZeneca – far more than the rest of the country, which is struggling with its most severe outbreak yet.

The scheme has been hampered by last-minute rules changes, with the final regulations approved days ago. Only fully vaccinated tourists from countries deemed to be low- and medium-risk will be allowed to travel to Phuket, and they will need to provide a negative Covid test as well as other documentation.

Travellers will be required to comply with various disease measures on arrival, including wearing a mask at all times when outdoors. They will also need to stay at special, certified hotels where 70% of staff have been vaccinated, and download a tracking app on their phone.



Celebratory sprays of water are prepared for an Etihad Airways plane arriving from Abu Dhabi carrying passengers for the Phuket Sandbox tourism scheme. Photograph: Lillian Suwanrumpha/AFP/Getty

Siripakorn Cheawsamoot, the deputy governor for international marketing at the Tourism Authority of Thailand, said while the number of tourists travelling to Phuket this week was still low, it was hoped the programme could provide a model for safe tourism in Thailand.

Flights are expected on Thursday from Qatar, Israel and Singapore.

“It’s not just about the number of first-day arrivals but it’s about how we get the confidence of tourists, people and government to extend to another area,” he said. It is proposed that the island of Samui could reopen on 15 July.

[‘Devastated’ Phuket in race to vaccinate 70% of islanders in time for holiday season](#)

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Almost 40 million foreigners arrived in Thailand in 2019, but visitor numbers fell to just 6.7 million last year as the pandemic brought global

travel to a standstill. It's estimated that Thailand lost about \$50bn in tourism revenue.

In Phuket, where the economy is reliant on foreign travellers, the impact was felt by virtually all businesses. Many residents left the island after the pandemic hit and their livelihoods disappeared over night.

Some businesses have reopened before Thursday's arrivals, though areas such as Patong on Phuket's west coast, famous for its tourist nightlife, remain unusually quiet.

Rattiya Butjeen, who owns Nature Seafood restaurant in Rawai and a tour company, said she had managed to stay open but there had been very little business over the past year.

"There were days when we had no customers at all," she said. "Luckily, I have my own land and so I don't have to pay for the rent. But for other people who have to pay rent to operate, they suffer a lot."



People walk on an empty beach as Phuket gets ready to open to overseas tourists. Photograph: Jorge Silva/Reuters

Next month, her tour company has bookings for just two days. "If it was a normal situation right now we would be fully booked until the 15th," Rattiya

said.

Rattiya said she was glad tourists were gradually returning but the situation was still precarious. “It’s so uncertain. It depends on Covid. If the Covid situation gets better, I think we could be back on track. But I’m not sure,” she said.

In Phuket, daily case numbers remain in the single digits, and officials have said the scheme will be suspended if more than 90 cases are recorded in one week.

Elsewhere, Thailand is struggling to contain a third wave that began in April and has spread from Bangkok’s nightclubs to prisons, factories and construction camps.

In Bangkok and other high-risk areas, restaurants are closed except for takeaway food, and bars and nightclubs are shut. The country reported a record 57 deaths on Thursday and 5,553 cases.

About 10% of the Thai population has received at least one dose, while 4% are fully vaccinated.

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Australia ‘at back of the queue’ for Pfizer Covid vaccines, minister admits

Bulk of Pfizer and other mRNA vaccines expected to arrive in third quarter of this year, despite widespread lockdowns



Doctors have called for a new national vaccine campaign, but supplies of some vaccines in Australia are low. Photograph: Aaron Bunch/AAP

Doctors have called for a new national vaccine campaign, but supplies of some vaccines in Australia are low. Photograph: Aaron Bunch/AAP

[Helen Sullivan](#)

[@helenrsullivan](#)

Thu 1 Jul 2021 01.26 EDT

Australia's finance minister has said the country is at the "back of the queue" for Pfizer vaccines, contradicting assurances from the prime minister Scott Morrison and the health minister that "our strategy puts Australia at the front of the queue".

Simon Birmingham on Thursday said Australia has had supply challenges "because European countries and drug companies have favoured those nations who've had high rates of Covid for the delivery of vaccines like Pfizer".

"Which has put countries like New Zealand and Australia at the back of the queue in terms of receipt of some of those vaccines," Birmingham said.

"But they're coming."

The bulk of Australia's Pfizer and other mRNA vaccines are expected to arrive in the third quarter of this year. On Wednesday, the state of Queensland warned that it would run out of Pfizer vaccines in eight days, after the federal government denied a request for more supply.

[Vaccine rollout 2.0: Australia needs to do three things differently | Stephen Duckett and Anika Stobart for The Conversation](#)

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The delay comes as multiple state government leaders directly criticised the prime minister's [suggestion that people aged under 40](#) should approach GPs to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine, despite blood clot fears. The states of Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia have each [distanced themselves from the suggestion](#).

[Data released on Thursday](#) showed that just 7.92% of Australians aged 16 and over were fully vaccinated.

The Royal Australia College of General Practitioners (RACGP) called this week for a new national vaccine campaign, after a survey conducted by the professional body found that [92% of respondents believed Australia needed improved "public awareness and education"](#). The government has so far released a straightforward video campaign in which the former deputy chief

medical officer, Dr Nick Coatsworth, speaks to the camera and asks people to get vaccinated.

“The only ad I ever see is Dr Nick Coatsworth with a stethoscope around his neck just saying, ‘Trust the government, get vaccinated’,” Burnet Institute Epidemiologist Prof Mike Toole told the RACGP. “I don’t think that is really going to persuade anyone who’s hesitant – there’s no specificity about which vaccine.”

The ad has been mocked for its lack of creativity and emotive appeal – and the RACGP has warned that anti-vaxxers are filling the void.

02:16

How Australia's vaccination ad campaign compares with the rest of the world – video

Earlier in this week, Lt Gen John Frewen, who is in charge of the vaccine rollout, said that the government had yet to launch what he called a “rallying” national vaccination ad campaign because of the lack of Pfizer supply.

“The timing of the ad campaign really was around the supply of Pfizer,” he said on Wednesday. In a separate interview on 21 June he said: “We want to make sure that we don’t start the campaign until we’re comfortable that we can meet the demand that we hope will be engendered by the campaign.”

[Rift between states and Morrison government over AstraZeneca vaccine for under-40s grows](#)

[Read more](#)

On Thursday, as 27 new cases of Covid-19 were confirmed in Australia and large swaths of the country remained in lockdown, the debate around international arrivals grew more heated.

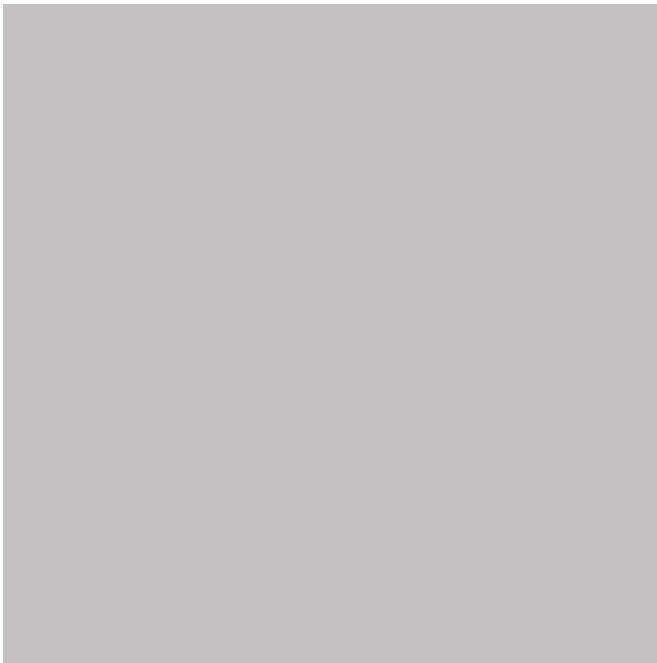
Australia has had closed borders with strict entry and exit requirements for more than a year, leading to roughly 40,000 Australians still being stranded overseas and growing frustration from those in the country as Europe, the UK and other developed nations reopen to international travel.

The Victorian premier, Daniel Andrews, called for an 80% reduction in the hotel quarantine capacity for the next three to four months until the vaccination rollout ramps up.

The Queensland premier, Anastasia Palaszczuk, warned on Wednesday night that Australia risked losing the chance to vaccinate the population before more widespread outbreaks occur, as she, too, called for a reduction in arrival capacity, and for quarantine to be moved to purpose-built regional facilities – away from densely-populated areas.

“We have had a magical moment here, a magical moment in time we are never going to get back, where we could have had the entire population vaccinated before the virus has arrived in this way,” she told local media. “And now I am very concerned that we may have left it too late.”

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Health

Fewer than 8% of Australian adults fully vaccinated four months into rollout

New data shows fewer than 40% of Australia's oldest and most vulnerable citizens have been fully vaccinated

- [What you need to know about getting AstraZeneca in Australia](#)
- [Fewer than one in five Australians in disability care vaccinated](#)
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People queue to receive their Pfizer Covid jab at the NSW vaccination hub at Sydney's Olympic Park on Thursday. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/EPA

People queue to receive their Pfizer Covid jab at the NSW vaccination hub at Sydney's Olympic Park on Thursday. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/EPA

[Christopher Knaus](#)

[@knausc](#)

Thu 1 Jul 2021 02.28 EDT

Fewer than 40% of Australia's oldest and most vulnerable citizens have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 more than four months into the rollout, new data shows.

The federal health department [released detailed data](#) on Thursday on the status of Australia's vaccine rollout.

It shows 6.11 million people over the age of 16 (about 30%) have had a single dose and just 1.63 million people, or 7.92%, were fully vaccinated.

The data, which breaks down vaccination by age and gender, shows full vaccination rates are still below 40% for all age cohorts in their 80s and 90s.

[Covid Australia vaccine rollout tracker: total number of people and percent vaccinated, daily vaccine doses and rate of progress](#)

[Read more](#)

About 35,000, or 67.1%, of those aged 95 and over have received a first dose and 20,311 (38.4%) have received a second dose.

Full vaccination rates for the 90-94, 85-89 and 80-84 age brackets were 29.8%, 20.2%, and 15.7% respectively.

The data also shows a continued low rate of two-dose vaccination for those aged in their 50s and 60s, compared with the younger cohort of people aged in their 40s – which can be explained at least in part by the 12-week wait for a second dose of AstraZeneca, which is recommended for those over 60, and [until recently for those over 50](#). The two Pfizer doses are generally given only three weeks apart.

Australia's vaccine rollout began on 20 February. People over 50 have been eligible for vaccination since 3 May.

About 105,062, or 6.7%, of Australians aged 50 to 54 have received both doses, and 34.3% have received a first dose, while about 99,425 (6.4%) of

people aged 55 to 59 are fully vaccinated. The figures are worse for those aged in their 60s.

About 90,000 people, or 6.3%, aged 60 to 64 have received both doses, while 71,314, or 5.7%, of people aged 65 to 69 are fully vaccinated.

Australian vaccine doses by age groups as of 30 June 2021

First dose numbers for those aged in their 60s are stronger. About 48% of those aged 60 to 64 and 56.3% of those aged 65 to 69 have received a first dose.

The proportion of those in their 70s who are fully vaccinated was only marginally higher than those in their 40s, although many more of the older cohort (eligible for AstraZeneca) had received their first dose than those in their 40s (eligible for Pfizer).

Full vaccination rates for the 75 to 79 and 70 to 74 cohorts were 13.6% and 12.1% respectively. The rates for the 45 to 49 and 40 to 44 age brackets were 12% and 10.4%.

The gender split is fairly even across the age cohorts.

For those aged 95 and over, about 69.2% of women have had a first dose, and 61.8% of men. In the 90 to 95 cohort, 71% of both men and women have received a first dose. A slightly higher proportion of men aged in their 70s and 80s have been vaccinated than women. A higher proportion of women in their 40s, 50s and 60s have been vaccinated compared to men.

Hassan Vally, an epidemiologist and associate professor in public health at La Trobe University, said the percentage of those 60 and over who were fully vaccinated should increase substantially in coming weeks due to the time lag between the first and second doses of AstraZeneca.

“The positive spin on this is that we’re going to see a huge increase in fully vaccinated people who are older when we just tick over that interval between first and second dose,” he said.

[States push to slash international arrivals as Coalition pledges to ‘look at evidence’](#)

[Read more](#)

Thursday’s data did not provide a breakdown for the various cohorts within phases 1A and 1B of the rollout – such as front-line health workers and aged and disability facility staff and residents.

The rate of vaccination among some of these groups, including [paramedics in Victoria](#) and [the aged care sector](#), is also low.

The Victorian government prioritised vaccinations for paramedics after the rate of vaccination was revealed and the federal government has changed its guidelines for aged care staff to make vaccination mandatory.

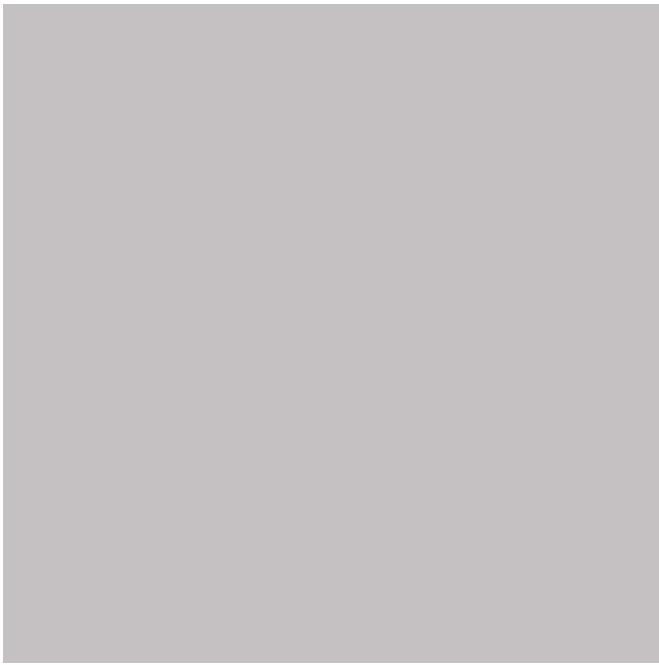
Vally said he believed the government wanted to release more data but there were technical and privacy issues.

“Everyone has been wanting more information and more transparency can only be good,” he said. “If people have the information, they can track how things are going and they can just have more confidence.”

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Byelections

Galloway bid for Batley and Spen seat mired in intimidation claims

West Yorkshire byelection campaign accused of fuelling anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric to disarm Labour candidate



George Galloway, far left, at a rally in Batley, West Yorkshire, during the byelection campaign. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

George Galloway, far left, at a rally in Batley, West Yorkshire, during the byelection campaign. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[Maya Wolfe-Robinson](#)

Thu 1 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

On 27 May this year, while most of Westminster was still digesting the explosive evidence from the former government adviser Dominic Cummings, two other well-known political agitators were visiting the West [Yorkshire](#) constituency of Batley and Spen.

Laurence Fox, fresh from his failed London mayoral bid, [posted a selfie](#) taken with Paul Halloran, an independent candidate who garnered 12% of the vote in the 2019 general election with the [Heavy Woollen District](#) Independents.

On the same day, [George Galloway](#), fresh from his failed bid for the Scottish parliament, launched his campaign, announcing: “I’m standing against Keir Starmer. If Keir Starmer loses this byelection, it’s curtains for Keir Starmer.”

Just over a month later, the byelection has been mired in accusations of aggression and intimidatory tactics from Galloway’s campaign, which some say has fuelled anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric against activists and Kim Leadbeater, Labour’s candidate. In recent days, Leadbeater has been seen accompanied by uniformed police officers while campaigning.

[Chased and heckled, but Jo Cox’s sister is unbowed in election fight](#)
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Meanwhile, Galloway, who is standing as an independent, under the banner of the Workers Party of Britain, has branded the Conservative hopeful “the Invisible Man” and has launched legal action against Kirklees council in a row over the size of the font on his posters.

On Wednesday, Ferhan Khan, a Muslim LGBTQ+ activist, said he felt Galloway had treated him “with contempt” during a clash; Khan had said Galloway’s supporters were “physically intimidating”.

Khan, who is a Scot, went to Batley after seeing a video of Leadbeater being aggressively confronted by Shakeel Afsar, a campaigner who [led protests in Birmingham](#) against LGBTQ+ education in schools.

“If he’s going to go after the Muslim vote in Batley, what about LGBTQIA Muslims? Should they feel safe? Will he protect them from the

discrimination which unfortunately does exist within our community?" Khan said.

Jack Deakin, a 22-year-old Labour councillor from Warwickshire, has said that issues over LGBTQ+ education in schools came up repeatedly on doorsteps and that he had faced homophobic abuse while campaigning.

Deakin said Galloway supporters had mocked the way that he moved and spoke, and that he had had several people shout "bondu", a Punjabi word for gay, at him in the street, in efforts to intimidate Labour activists. "They are trying to intimidate us and they don't want us to get out the vote on the day in those roads and those areas."

He said he had had to counter myths about Labour's policy on education, explaining that "primary school children are not taught about sex, just that some people have two mums or two dads". Deakin added: "Most aren't homophobic, but Galloway's supporters are stirring the pot. When the circus leaves, Kim will still be living here."

A spokesperson for Galloway said he condemned all forms of physical intimidation. He also said two of his senior campaign staff were LGBTQ+ and that Galloway was awarded a Stonewall award 30 years ago as an MP.

Ryan Stephenson, standing for the [Conservatives](#), has kept a low profile during the increasingly tense campaign, successfully managing to avoid answering questions on knotty issues such as Israel-Palestine or about a teacher's suspension from Batley grammar school after showing images of the prophet Mohammed during a religious studies lesson.

By contrast, Galloway has made these controversial topics the crux of his campaign, piling pressure on Labour to respond. He had previously defended protesters outraged at the religious picture being shown, saying: "People have got a right to defend religious sensibilities and be offended by gratuitous egregious insults." He described it as a "hate poster" in an interview with the Guardian.

However, in an event organised by Fox and Halloran last Thursday, billed as a "free speech rally" in [support of the suspended teacher](#), Galloway

sidestepped the issue, focusing instead on a diatribe against “cancel culture”, telling the crowd he did not want his young children at primary school aged seven and nine to be taught about anal sex. “I don’t want them taught how to masturbate. I don’t want them taught there are 99 genders. I don’t want them taught that men can become women by the mere act of declaring themselves to be, and end up in an Olympic team, beating the actual girls and women.”

[Chance of holding Batley and Spen as low as 5%, say key Labour figures](#)
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As well as the inflammatory rhetoric, there is also suspicion among Labour campaigners that insiders are passing information about canvassing plans and internal polling numbers to his team, fuelling an atmosphere of paranoia.

There are obvious physical signs of a hard-fought election campaign on the ground: posters, banners and stickers plastered over lampposts all over the constituency, Galloway’s vintage green and yellow campaign bus continually on tour, and a car with a megaphone passing through Asian areas of Batley blaring out: “Do not vote Labour, it’s a waste of time, look at the roads.”

Support from influential local business people and property developers has allowed Galloway to set up three campaign headquarters, and Worker Party activists to bed down in the constituency for the campaign, housed by local residents.

Chris Williamson, the former MP for Derby North, who was [suspended from Labour](#) in a row over anti-semitism, has also campaigned locally on Galloway’s behalf.

However, much of the campaign has been hard fought on Whatsapp and Facebook, making it harder for the opposition to track. Over recent days, [a letter from Muslim women](#) castigating aggressive behaviour and misogyny from some has widely circulated among community WhatsApp groups, and a defiant response has been swiftly sent back.

Several say it had “divided the community”. Farrukh Patel, 49, said: “It has gone messy. It’s all been personal and attacking each other. I’ve never known anything like this before. What’s that all about? It’s not our culture.”

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Mental health

‘Culture has been wrecked’: swimmers lament changes to Hampstead ponds

New fees have saddened many who use the area to connect with friends and nature

- [Disabled woman begins legal action over Hampstead ponds fees](#)



The bathing ponds have provided an escape from city life. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

The bathing ponds have provided an escape from city life. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

[Lucy Campbell](#)

Thu 1 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Micah Sami spent her teenage years swimming in the Hampstead ladies' pond. The freedom to access the water, or sit in the meadow, helped her cope whenever she wasn't feeling great.

But since the City of London Corporation (CoLC) enforced charges for the first time in the history of the ponds last year – and raised them again earlier this year, a move now [the subject of a legal challenge](#) – it doesn't feel the same.

"It's like an iron fist has made its way into the space, it's more controlled and there's a barrier of access," the 21-year-old says. "It's removed that sacred femininity of the place, the freedom to feel unbothered and unwatched, to connect with nature without any mediation through payment. There's this harshness about it now."

"It makes me feel sad. It feels painful to think about, but I feel alienated from the space. It really hurts my heart that that's what's happened."

The bathing ponds have always been a hallowed and essential part of life for those who use them. They provide a unique escape from city life and many depend on the ponds for their mental and physical health.

[Pond life on Hampstead Heath - archive, 5 June 1963](#)

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But the experience has changed fundamentally in the last year. Many said the new regime had eliminated spontaneity and ruined the ambience and inclusive ethos of the ponds where everybody was equal. There's a deep sense of a loss to the community.

"Lots of people have stopped going so their memories of the place aren't sullied," says activist Alix Lemkin, who co-convenes the Save Our Ponds campaign run by Forum '71, which has held protests against the charges all year. She swam in the ponds every day for 30 years and refuses to under the new regime, in solidarity with friends who have struggled during the pandemic and can't afford to pay.

“People don’t like the atmosphere any more and many don’t see the people they used to see all the time. The culture has been wrecked,” she says.

Traditionally, access to the ponds was free and swimmers could pay voluntary contributions. The CoLC maintains mandatory fees were necessary to sustainably fund upkeep of the ponds.

A survey conducted by the Kenwood Ladies’ Pond Association in January, before the second cost rise, found the charges had affected affordability for 58% of 600 respondents, more than half of whom swam less often as a result and 25% of whom could no longer afford to swim at all.

For the last 15 years, Jamal Saad, 45, swam nearly every day in the men’s pond – after work, early in the morning, on a whim when cycling by. He knew exactly which faces he would see, and felt relaxed in nature, at ease with himself and a world away from his problems.

“That whole nature, the beauty of the place, has been destroyed. It’s not an escape any more. Now you feel you’re being watched – people checking you’ve paid, your membership, that you’re wearing your wristband. It’s restrictive rather than the freedom we used to have.”

The booking system and charges had priced him out, along with most of his friends. “It’s not the pond I love any more – it feels like a new club for certain people but not for everyone. I feel we’ve lost something really important.”

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Equality Act 2010

Disabled woman begins legal action over Hampstead ponds fees

Christina Efthimiou seeks judicial review against City of London Corporation, claiming charges are discriminatory

- 'Culture has been wrecked': swimmers lament changes



A swimmer paddles in the water at the Hampstead Heath ponds after Covid-19 lockdown restrictions eased in March. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

A swimmer paddles in the water at the Hampstead Heath ponds after Covid-19 lockdown restrictions eased in March. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

[Lucy Campbell](#)

Thu 1 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

A woman who swims regularly in the Hampstead ponds is taking legal action against the City of [London](#) Corporation, claiming that the new charging regime discriminates against disabled people.

Christina Efthimiou, who is disabled and receives disability-related benefits, has swum at the ladies' pond for four years. She is a member of the Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association (KLPA), which is supporting her in seeking a judicial review against the Corporation.

Efthimiou, 59, says that access to the ponds is an essential part of managing disability for her and many others, and that the [value of cold-water swimming](#) for physical and mental health is widely recognised.

“The benefits to me are immense,” she said. “If I have to stop using the ponds for my regular exercise I don’t know what I will be able to do instead. I and many others will be priced out by the charges, which will change the ponds to a privilege for the better off.”



Christina Efthimiou, 59, has swum at the ladies' pond for four years.
Photograph: Handout

Mary Powell, vice-chair of the KLPA, said the ladies' pond had historically provided a sanctuary for women and girls, including those with disabilities, victims of violence and abuse, and those from faith groups that demand

modesty, but the new charging system was proving exclusionary for many people. While the legal case deals expressly with the disproportionate effects on disabled people, Powell said access had also been affected for other groups.

“There are limitations to the free swims offered for over-60s before 9.30am, for example, particularly for elderly members or those with fluctuating health conditions who can’t get to the ponds that early or need to be accompanied,” she said. “The times also clash with when Oyster 60+ or freedom passes can be used, which cancels out the benefit of a free swim.”

Up until 2005 it was free to swim in the Hampstead Heath bathing ponds. Despite fierce opposition from the local community, the City of London Corporation (CoLC), which has run the world-famous ponds since 1989, implemented a charging regime, though this was self-policed, so people who couldn’t afford to pay still had access.

After a review in January last year, the CoLC [introduced mandatory fees](#) for the first time in the ponds’ history. The KLPA said this was in spite of strong support from the swimming associations for adopting a system where income could be increased without excluding anyone unable to pay.

But the Corporation opted for increased mandatory charges, which included a doubling of prices for adults and a 140% rise for concessions, which it insists was necessary to sustainably fund upkeep of the ponds.

In February 2021, the CoLC increased rates again. While non-concessionary rates were increased in line with inflation at 1.3%, the cost of a six-month pass for those eligible for concessions, including disabled people on benefits, was bumped by 21.5% to £40.11 and a 12-month pass by 15.1% to £75.97.

The CoLC’s refusal to allow for payment in instalments and make it easier to pay cash were further barriers for disadvantaged swimmers, Powell said.

In the legal case, Efthimiou argues that the new charging regime, which took effect on 1 April, disproportionately affects people with disabilities and that the City of London has breached its duty to make reasonable adjustments;

has discriminated against her and other disabled people contrary to section 19 of the Equality Act; and has breached its duties under article 14 of the European convention on human rights read with article 8.

She's asking the court to repeal the Corporation's decision to implement the increased charges on the grounds that the regime amounts to unlawful discrimination in respect of disabled people.

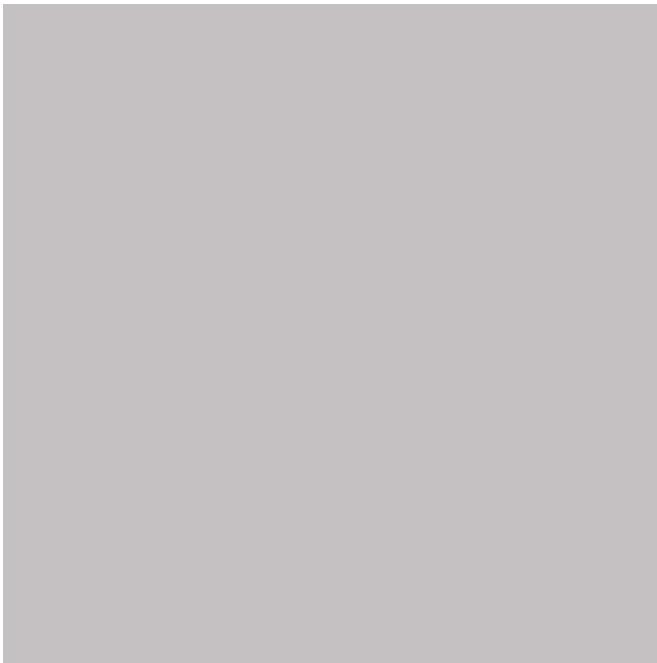
Kate Egerton, a solicitor at the law firm Leigh Day, said: "In our view, the City of London has failed to engage with the impact its charging regime is having on disabled swimmers and to comply with its equality duties to disabled swimmers who rely on the ponds to manage their health.

"The current charging regime demonstrates a total lack of understanding of the financial position of those who survive on benefits and the significant physical and psychological benefits to disabled people of swimming at the ponds."

A spokesperson for the CoLC said: "The Hampstead Heath charity offers a 40% swimming discount to disabled people, and a season ticket at the bathing ponds brings the cost of swimming down to as little as £1.46 per week.

"We subsidised swimming at the bathing ponds by nearly £600,000 in 2020/21 and we offer a comprehensive support scheme, including free morning swims for under-16s and over-60s. Concessions apply to disabled people and those in receipt of state benefits.

"Swimming charges are reinvested to ensure that affordable, safe and sustainable access to outdoor swimming is available to as many people as possible for generations to come."



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Books

Matt Haig: ‘I have never written a book that will be more spoofed or hated’



‘I’m definitely in a very grateful place’ ... Matt Haig. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

‘I’m definitely in a very grateful place’ ... Matt Haig. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

The multimillion-selling novelist and mental health guru talks about his days as the ‘karaoke Ian McEwan’, finding fame and fortune – and taking on the haters



Stephen Moss

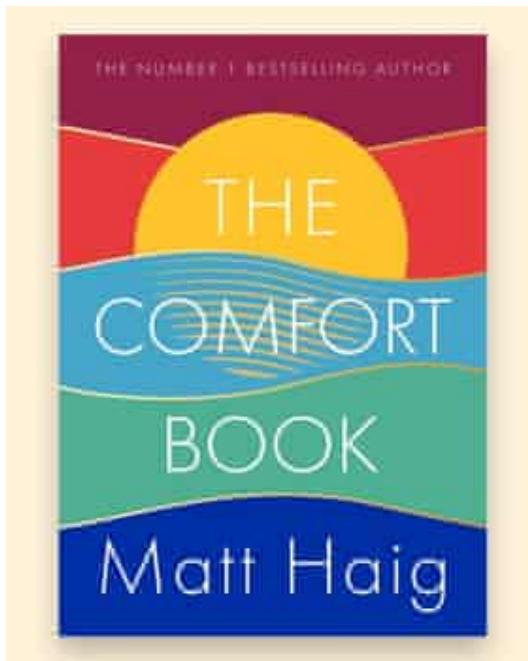
Thu 1 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

If you peer down the hill from Matt Haig's immaculate townhouse in Brighton, you can see the sea, which today is shimmeringly blue under a hot sun. "We bought the house for that view," he says as he answers the door, which is painted turquoise. Bright, alive, vibrant. Haig – novelist, self-help guru, periodic endurer of depression and anxiety – needs these colours, that view, this sun, even the statement-making front door.

Today is a good day, despite my lunchtime appearance to discuss his new book, prosaically titled *The Comfort Book*. The music-loving, eco-evangelising Haig is wearing a black T-shirt emblazoned with the words "No music on a dead planet". He is padding around in his socks, through one of which his big toe is peeping. I like the worn-out sock, because his books now attract six-figure advances; he received £600,000 for his 2020 novel [The Midnight Library](#), which recently [clocked up its millionth sale](#). He must be seriously wealthy and could be wearing silk socks, but he isn't. He hasn't let the remarkable success that has come his way over the past five years go to his head – or indeed his toes.

Haig will be 46 on Saturday. For his first 40 years, life was a struggle. In many ways, it is still a struggle – he has anxiety and tinnitus and says he is always alert to the danger of depression returning – but at least now he is riding the crest of a wave of commercial success.

The turnaround in his fortunes is usually attributed to the publication in 2015 of [Reasons to Stay Alive](#), the account of his breakdown in Ibiza in 1999 when, while working in a nightclub on the island and devoting himself too enthusiastically to alcohol and drugs, he came close to killing himself. But he traces the beginning of his rise as a writer to [The Humans](#), a novel he published two years earlier that imagined a Cambridge maths don whose body has been taken over by aliens. After a decade trying, not very successfully, to write literary fiction, he had discovered his facility for the high-concept, quasi-philosophical novel – and critics loved it.



“The Humans was the book where I felt finally, truly confident in myself as a writer,” says Haig. “It didn’t become a bestseller, but it was the first optimistic book I’d written. The books I’d written in my 20s and early 30s were quite bleak.” Back then, he was published by Jonathan Cape and was trying to write books tailored to that storied imprint; he calls them “karaoke Ian McEwan”. “I suffered from impostor syndrome. There were all sorts of insecurities in there,” he says.

Cape dropped him when he sent them a novel about vampires living dull suburban lives (it was later published by his new publisher, Canongate, as [The Radleys](#)). This came at a time of personal turmoil. He and his partner, the writer Andrea Semple, had just had their second child; they were living in York in financial insecurity. Haig was drinking too much – a factor in his breakdown – and starting to feel panicky and depressed. Being axed by Cape exacerbated the self-doubt he was already experiencing. “I felt: ‘No one else will ever want me now. What do I do? Maybe I should never have been a writer. Maybe it was all a mistake.’”

His fears were unfounded. Canongate rescued him. He realised the key was to write for himself and not worry about critical expectations or the division between literary and commercial fiction. *The Humans* gave him confidence and confirmed his new publisher’s faith in him; *Reasons to Stay Alive*, which was derived from a [blog he wrote in 2014](#), established him firmly in the public mind as a teller of stories and an open, uninhibited, ego-free chaperone through the maelstrom of life.

Much to Haig’s surprise, *Reasons to Stay Alive* became a bestseller. “It was scary for a while,” he says. He began to be contacted by a lot of depressed and suicidal people. “I’m not a doctor or a therapist. I didn’t know what my role was,” he says. “As a novelist, you are absolved from responsibility and you’re not very good at taking it on. There was a little moment when I would have pressed a button not to have written it. Certainly not now, because I’ve come to terms with it, but there was a time when it was a bit too much.”

Reasons to Stay Alive established Haig as a mental health mentor. He followed it in 2018 with [Notes on a Nervous Planet](#), which offered advice about remaining on an even keel in an increasingly fake and frenzied world. If that was a portrait of a society at full tilt, his new book is born of the pandemic. *The Comfort Book*, a collection of aphorisms and inspirational stories of survival against the odds, is a guide to living and finding hope in these disjointed times.



‘No one really fits in, so almost everyone fits in’ ... Haig at home in Brighton. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

“I don’t see *The Comfort Book* as purely a mental health book,” he says. “It’s more about life and stress and self-acceptance. I wrote it during the first [English] lockdown, when I was in an anxiety dip myself, so this is definitely not a book written feeling like I’ve got all the answers. I was writing it from an uncomfortable place and, in a way, for myself. I’ve never had more enjoyment and relaxation writing a book.” This was partly because there were no structural pressures. The book is freeform: he encourages readers to read it in whatever order they like; there are acres of white space; and it intersperses short chapters with lists. Some pages contain just a single epigram.

He expects people who dislike his popular philosophising and self-help evangelism – and there are many – to mock *The Comfort Book*. “I have never written a book that will be more spoofed or hated,” he says. “I am in the brace position. When reviewers have criticised my books in the past, the aspect of my book they criticised – this book is all that aspect. This will be my most Marmite book.” He says that “people who are at all snobby about self-help books, inspirational quotes, Instagram, sunsets, cats” will hate it. “I’ve had it all by now,” he says. “I’ve had people mock everything I write

as ‘tea towel wisdom’, so for The Comfort Book my publishers are going to do a tea towel with one of the quotes. I embrace all that.”

Haig is an enigma. He struggles with anxiety, yet is happy to take on his detractors. He warns against the dangers of social media, but has [450,000 followers on Twitter](#) and uses the platform vigorously. “I don’t mind saying things that might be annoying if I believe in them,” he says. “I went so long being nervous and silent and timid – feelings that nearly killed me – that I’ve now gone to the other extreme, where I’ll say the thing that possibly shouldn’t be said.”

He is determined to stand up to “mental health snobbery … When you’re feeling a bit rough and ropey, and your mind is distracted, you can’t absorb the most highbrow text. You’re not there reading Freud and Jung and Lacan. A pop song can save your life. An episode of Friends can change your life. But when it’s in the world of books, it becomes this snobfest. I’m resistant to that. I also like confusing people, so I’ll do my big, corny, sentimental, puppy-dog line and then I’ll write a chapter about Aristotle.”

I never say I’m a happy person … It imposes certain expectations

The Comfort Book will no doubt confirm the views of Sarah Ditum, who earlier this year wrote an article in the Spectator headlined [“The banality of Matt Haig”](#). “Life is hard; make it easier on yourself by not reading Matt Haig,” she advised. “Oh, and breathe.” Did her words leave a mark? “Occasionally, in low moments, that headline will become the voice in my head,” says Haig. “But I felt she was saying stuff that has been said about me before, so I was used to it. She was also doing what she said I was doing – being prescriptive. People don’t like to be told not to read things.” Ditum argued Haig’s recovery had no lessons for others, but he insists people tell him constantly that his experience echoes their own.

Despite his combativeness on social media – he had a recent run-in on Twitter with “snowflake”-baiter Piers Morgan – Haig still struggles with low self-esteem. How can this persist when he is selling books by the bucketload? “You start to feel: ‘I don’t deserve this,’” he says. “You go from underrated writer to overhyped writer and both of them feed insecurities.

You worry about the next one. You're grateful on the one hand, and feel excessively privileged, but you also feel performance anxiety and a kind of stage fright.

"So, it's harder and harder to get to that place of creative freedom where you think: 'If I was just starting out now and this was the first thing I'd ever put out, what would it be?' Publishers have expectations, readers have expectations, and you know from social media exactly how something is going to go down. It takes a will of steel to not lean to those expectations, but you do learn over time that if you lean to them that massively backfires."

It seems odd to follow the huge success of *The Midnight Library* with a self-help book, but Haig sees connections. "Thematically, they are linked, so even though they will be in different places in bookshops, there is an echo. *The Midnight Library* is also a book about self-acceptance." In any case, he enjoys his protean writing identity. "Even though I'm totally bracketed now as 'mental health writer', I try not to think that. Straight after *Reasons to Stay Alive*, I did [A Boy Called Christmas](#), which was a children's book about Father Christmas as a boy. I get bored very easily, so with every book there has to be something new about it."

He and his family moved to Brighton – a place "where no one really fits in, so almost everyone fits in", Haig says – in 2015. He and Semple home-school their children, 13-year-old Lucas and 12-year-old Pearl. They had been at school in York, but weren't particularly enjoying it, and their experiences reminded Haig of his own problems at secondary school in Newark in Nottinghamshire, where as a sensitive teenager he felt isolated and directionless in a tough, sporty environment.

"I went from a very secure, comfortable little village school to this big, sprawling state secondary school, which was a bit rough and a bit ropey, and I struggled to fit in. That imprints things on you. I've got lots of memories of being on my own and trying to look like I'm not on my own." He had uneasy relationships with his fellow pupils – they called him "Psycho" – and he became a teenage shoplifter, until being arrested got him back on the straight and narrow.

People mock my writing as ‘tea towel wisdom’, so my publishers are going to do a tea towel with one of the quotes

He wasn’t very academic, but [enjoyed English](#); he studied English and history at the University of Hull, before doing a master’s in English literature at Leeds. He told the Financial Times that doing a second degree was a way of [“putting off being an adult”](#); he delayed that step further by moving to Ibiza, where he worked for the party organiser Manumission – he is usually described as a bartender, but says his main job was selling tickets.

“There was a day when I woke up and thought: ‘I’m going to die today,’” he says. There was no immediate connection between drug-taking and the panic attack, he says – it occurred at 11am and he had not been taking drugs in the preceding period – but he sees the party lifestyle as part of the context of his breakdown. “It was the third summer of bad sleep, excess alcohol and some drugs. I never bought my own drugs; they were just there.”

Haig once said he didn’t want to be seen as “Mr Depression”, but is that now inevitable? “I can’t control how other people see me,” he says. “I’m just grateful that I’ve got the freedom, thanks to my publisher, to write about what I want to write about. If I suddenly want to write a fairytale, or about Father Christmas or vampires or aliens, I can do it.” He enjoys the genre-busting variety, although he jokes about having a less “messy” writing career. “I dream about getting a detective – obviously, a detective with mental health problems – and following him through [all my books], but I haven’t found my magic detective yet.”

Everything in the Brighton garden looks rosy, whatever the Haig-haters might say about The Comfort Book. [A Boy Called Christmas has been made into a film](#) that will be released this year – just before Christmas, naturally – while a film of his 2017 novel [How to Stop Time](#) is being developed [by Benedict Cumberbatch’s production company](#).

It all seems a long way from the dark moment in Ibiza in 1999. Is he in that fabled “good place”? “I will for ever have to be mindful of my mental health,” he says. “I can’t take my eye off the ball. But I’m definitely in a very grateful place. I never say I’m a happy person, because that’s almost

like saying you're a sad person. It fixes you as that thing and imposes certain expectations. I try to be open to everything.

"I'll always be a hypochondriac; I'll always be a nervous wreck about certain things. But I've got to a point where I know myself well enough to know what's good and what's bad for me, and I feel much more in control of the bad things. I do feel a long way from that cliff edge, and when all this is over I'll go back to the Balearics and, to use that most self-help of words, get some closure."

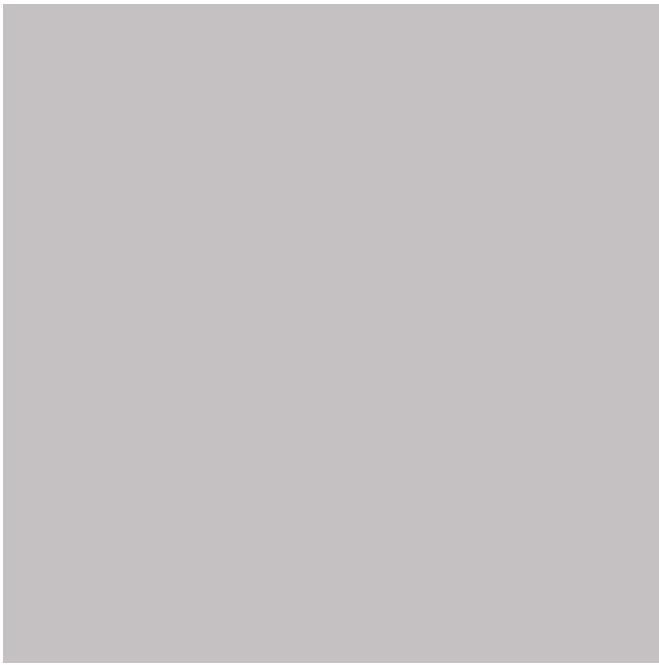
The Comfort Book is published on 6 July (Canongate, £16.99). To support the Guardian, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international suicide helplines can be found at befrienders.org.

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Poland's LGBTQ protests are glimmers of hope in an illiberal dystopia

[Agnieszka Holland](#) and Olga Tokarczuk

Showdowns between Polish activists and its ultra-conservative government could help build a more tolerant future

- Agnieszka Holland is a film director and president of the European Film Academy
- Olga Tokarczuk is a writer and laureate of the 2018 Nobel prize in literature



Illustration: Sébastien Thibault/The Guardian

Illustration: Sébastien Thibault/The Guardian

Thu 1 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

If you want to understand the currents of change shaping our world, look to the periphery. Countries and people pushed to the margins teach us a lot about the health of democracy. They paint a picture steeped in paradox. As storytellers from one of these strange borderlands of western culture, we have made it our life's work to truffle-hunt for narratives of hope and perseverance in dark places. Our homeland, [Poland](#), is filled with such stories.

Take [Elżbieta Podleśna](#), a veteran civil rights activist, who was drawn to Płock, a town in central Poland where the clergy wields unchecked political power. She led a group protesting against a church exhibition that encouraged believers to battle against so-called LGBT sins. Overnight they plastered posters of the Virgin Mary with a rainbow-coloured halo around the church – and promptly drew the fury of the police, the Catholic church hierarchy and lawyers brandishing the blasphemy laws.

At her trial, Podleśna mounted a blistering defence speech worthy of a Hollywood movie. The duel between the church and Podleśna and her fellow conspirators, [Anna Prus and Joanna Gzyra-Iskandar](#), crystallised the tensions raging in Poland between a modernising society and a conservative power structure. These showdowns matter: they should be sounding an alarm for Europe and beyond. It is in provincial courtrooms that Enlightenment values are being fought over; it's there, in academia and above all in the streets that the future of a tolerant west will be decided.

For a young person discovering and defining their sexuality in Poland, the outlook is grim. Recent studies [show](#) less than a third of Polish LGBTQ youths can count on acceptance from their parents when they come out. Many are beaten, mocked and abused – at home, at school or in church. They cannot find recourse in the law, as violence and discrimination based on homophobia and transphobia are not officially considered to be hate crimes in our country.

The actions and words of the Polish leadership speak for themselves. Last year, President Andrzej Duda described LGBTQ rights as a foreign ideology that was [worse than communism](#). Poland's government, led by the Law and Justice party (PiS), is inflaming hate by supporting rightwing organisations that spread homophobia and misogyny through campaigns that brutalise

society. They are superficially effective. Having recently succeeded in pushing through a near total [ban on abortion](#), Poland has become a source of inspiration for illiberals across the continent – a stamping ground for extremists.

It is no surprise therefore, that human rights watchdogs consistently rank Poland as being among the most homophobic countries in Europe. But this is not the complete picture. There are glimmers of hope in our ultra-conservative dystopia. Take a [stroll around Warsaw](#) today and you will see thousands of windows wrapped in rainbow flags, symbolising equality and freedom. Even the capital's main landmark, the Palace of Culture, a gargantuan Soviet eyesore, regularly lights up in rainbow colours – a reminder that Warsaw still has an [independent-minded mayor](#).

The more the rightwing government tightens its grip, the stronger becomes the voice of protest. A new generation of activists is emerging, building solidarity between the LGBTQ community and the women's rights movement. State-run propaganda is being matched by counter-campaigns to raise awareness. And while dozens of small Polish towns have declared themselves “LGBT-free zones”, islands of tolerance are also appearing across the country, where progressive mayors and city councils create sanctuaries for oppressed minorities.

Despite very limited resources, the grassroots movement has already started to reap the fruits of its labour by effectively changing the attitudes of millions of Poles. We now have a young generation that is more progressive than ever, and increasingly immune to the aggressive messaging of the religious right. History shows that it is always the oppressed minorities who act as a catalyst for global change. There are parallels here with the [1969 Stonewall rebellion](#) in New York, which prompted a powerful movement for LGBTQ political and legal equality.

Much like the Stonewall protesters more than half a century ago, equality campaigners in Poland are changing the fabric of our society. A brave female judge eventually cleared Elżbieta Podleśna and her allies of all charges. Other activists are creating hostels and sanctuaries for young people made homeless by their homophobic families, providing legal advice to

persecuted activists, distributing science-based sexual education to Poland's youth, and giving psychological counselling to victims of violence.

As a result of the landmark Stonewall protests, homosexuality was eventually removed from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental disorders. The riot also sparked the first national march on Washington for lesbian and gay rights. Now is the time for Poland to secure rights for all its citizens. Its determined activists have waited long enough. In many of them you will recognise reflections of the great heroes of social rights movements around the world. These brave young Poles follow in their footsteps, refusing to give up. Read their stories, look up their names. They deserve your support.

- Agnieszka Holland is a film director. She is an Academy Award nominee, president of the European Film Academy and a board member of the [Equaversity Foundation](#). Olga Tokarczuk is a writer and laureate of the 2018 Nobel prize in literature. She is 2018 Man Booker International prize winner and a board member of the Equaversity Foundation
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The pain that can't be seen

I suffer from three chronic conditions. The worst part is knowing my pain could have been prevented

[Lucia Osborne-Crowley](#)

For years my pain was dismissed again and again by doctors who did not believe I was suffering



‘A staggering 70% of all people with chronic pain conditions are women.’
Illustration: Hannah Izzard/Guardian Design

‘A staggering 70% of all people with chronic pain conditions are women.’
Illustration: Hannah Izzard/Guardian Design

Thu 1 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

One summer’s day in 2009, I was 17 and on a beach holiday with friends when I was struck very suddenly by a stabbing pain in my abdomen. In the 12 years since, it has never gone away.

The pain was so bad that I was admitted to hospital several times over those 12 years. I was misdiagnosed on multiple occasions and sent home with no diagnosis or treatment on others.

In 2010 I was diagnosed with endometriosis, a chronic inflammatory condition affecting one in 10 women whose primary symptom is persistent pelvic pain. A few months later, I was diagnosed with what is now called painful bladder syndrome, or interstitial cystitis, as it was known when I received my diagnosis.

[Sufferers of chronic pain have long been told it's all in their head. We now know that's wrong](#)

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Five years after that, in more pain than ever despite trying every treatment under the sun, I was also diagnosed with Crohn's disease, another chronic inflammatory disease that causes severe pelvic pain.

I was in and out of hospital for years trying to get answers about my pain, but I was dismissed again and again by doctors who did not believe that I was suffering. Even when I eventually received the right diagnoses after years of misdiagnosed sexually transmitted infections, my pain was rarely treated as a priority in the management of my illness, despite it being by far my most debilitating symptom. Again and again, I came up against the notion that I should be able to manage it on my own.

Pain statistics across the globe bear this out. A 2021 [study](#) at the University of Miami found that women who expressed the same degree of pain as men were taken less seriously and observers considered the women's pain to be less intense. Women are up to [25% less likely](#) to be given opioids when they present to an emergency department with acute abdominal pain, according to a study published in the peer-reviewed journal Academic Emergency Medicine.

Ignoring women's pain not only stops us from healing, it actually makes it more likely the pain will become permanent

And here's the worst part: the treatment I received from doctors, the attitude that meant I was continually denied help and sent home with my pain, also led to my own belief that my pain was illegitimate. I internalised their distrust. I grew determined to override and ignore my pain as much as I could. What I didn't know is that this approach would have devastating, life-long consequences.

Doctors are beginning to understand a condition called chronic pain – the name given to a condition where a person lives with pain for so long that the brain adapts and begins to alert the body to pain even where there is none. Pain has always been thought to be a symptom of an illness, but now doctors know that in some circumstances it can become an illness in itself.

Chronic pain develops when the body registers persistent pain and when we override these pain signals and force the body to push through the sensation of pain. With its only alarm system being ignored, the central nervous system develops a pattern in which it sends constant, amplified pain signals to the brain to try to get us to take notice. Chronic pain occurs most frequently in patients whose pain is ignored.

03:08

What is chronic pain and how does it work? – video explainer

Does it surprise you, then, to learn that a staggering 70% of all people with chronic pain conditions are women?

Once pain becomes chronic, it is almost impossible to cure. Pain changes you. But all of the conditions I have can be managed well if caught before the pain becomes persistent. That means that ignoring women's pain not only stops us from healing, it actually makes it more likely the pain will become permanent. Does that make you angry? It makes me angry.

It only takes three months of regular pain to develop a chronic pain disorder. By the time I learned that my pain could become permanent, I was 10 years and nine months too late.

Living with pain is exhausting and depressing. But the worst part of my pain is that I know it could have been prevented.

Sufferers of chronic pain have long been told it's all in their head. We now know that's not true. The pain that can't be seen looks at why doctors are playing catch-up on chronic pain conditions like endometriosis, migraine and more – and what they have to do with long Covid.

- Lucia Osborne-Crowley is a journalist and author. Her first book, I Choose Elena, was published by Allen & Unwin last year. Her second book, My Body Keeps Your Secrets, will be published by Allen & Unwin in September
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[OpinionChina](#)

China's Communist party has rewritten its own past – but the truth will surface

[Rana Mitter](#)

The history of the century-old party is far more interesting than its sanitised propaganda would suggest



Souvenirs with portraits of Chinese president Xi Jinping and former Chinese leader Mao Zedong in Beijing, China. Photograph: Roman Pilipey/EPA

Souvenirs with portraits of Chinese president Xi Jinping and former Chinese leader Mao Zedong in Beijing, China. Photograph: Roman Pilipey/EPA

Thu 1 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

A [new museum](#) commemorating the history of the Chinese Communist party (CCP) opened in June in Beijing as part of the runup to the party's 100th anniversary. Online images of its collections show reverential black-and-white photos of the dozen or so young men who gathered at the party's [founding meeting](#) in Shanghai in 1921. Those activists, one of whom was a young library assistant called Mao Zedong, would have found the China of

2021 impossible to recognise: an economic behemoth run by the most powerful and longest-lasting Communist party in the world.

Yet although much of the CCP's propaganda is firmly focused on the future, the party is still obsessed with controlling the telling of its own past. The museum's narrative is of a [China](#) brought to peace and prosperity by the inevitability of the CCP's rise to power. The bumpy realities of history, from the failed policies and leaders of the party's early years to the purges and brutalities that have marked its time in power, are played down or absent. The CCP has always been opaque about its own internal workings. Control of its narrative is another way of maintaining that mystery.

Over the past century and a half, China has endured numerous wars and the party has used each one to hammer home a different message. While the [opium wars](#) of the mid-19th century, when Britain's navy forced open China's doors, are invoked as a terrible warning as to what happens when China is weak, China's sufferings in the second world war give a rather different message. Although some [14 million people died](#) in the conflict against Japan, Xi Jinping has declared that it was "the first complete victory in a recent war where China resisted the invasion of a foreign enemy". China's foreign minister Wang Yi reminded westerners at the 2020 Munich security conference that the country was the first signatory to the UN charter in 1945. The implication was clear: China was a co-founder of the contemporary world order, and should have special rights within it.

The boundaries of permitted history are also sharply drawn. The CCP has recently defined "[historical nihilism](#)" as a grave offence. "Nihilism" is code for critical interpretations of the CCP's own history. It's fine to talk about the path to reform since 1978, but the Tiananmen Square demonstrations and subsequent killings of 1989 are off limits, the [Cultural Revolution](#) has been reduced to a limited mention in textbooks, and the [famine](#) caused by Mao's Great Leap Forward is completely absent.

Still, the new museum isn't just about events. It is also an affirmation that in the CCP's world, Marxism and Leninism are both alive and well. In the west, discussions of Marxism gained a slightly musty cold war feel after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Though China has kept its own devotion to Marxism rather muted in recent decades, there is nothing secret about the

CCP's continued reverence for the author of Das Kapital. In 2018, on the 200th anniversary of his birth, China delivered a 4.5 metre-high [statue of Marx](#) to his birthplace in Trier in Germany. Nor is this devotion purely about the past. Last year, Xi vowed to a politburo study session that he would "open up new frontiers for Marxist political economy in China". To those who point out that China's go-go economy looks pretty capitalist, he might cite Deng Xiaoping's belief that the first stage of socialism could turn out to be rather long.

This type of Marxism doesn't feature much explicit discussion of the topic that excited Karl Marx and Mao Zedong alike: class. Mao's political project was fixated on definitions of the term, with "bad" class backgrounds dooming successive generations like an inherited criminal record. But the CCP wished class away in 2002 when [Jiang Zemin put forward](#) his theory that it was fine to be a business entrepreneur and still rise high in the party. Nonetheless, the CCP's insistence on defining itself as Marxist defies conventional wisdom that China's remarkable economic growth is a purely technocratic phenomenon. Politics, and political economy, has always mattered to the CCP's leaders. Xi has only broken with his immediate predecessors by being so upfront about this.

Xi's China also pays tribute to the Leninist lessons of the past. The [Rectification campaigns](#) of the 1940s compelled aspiring party members to read texts by Mao to harden them against ideological deviance. Today, the term "rectify" has reappeared again as part of the CCP's plans, although now it is carried out [via an app](#) (designed by Alibaba and available on the Apple Store) that tests entrants' knowledge of Xi Jinping Thought. There is a continuity between the campaigns of the 1940s and those of the 2020s: the CCP understands that the training and loyalty of the elite is crucial. If the party members remain loyal, the masses can be brought along later. This Leninist legacy is also visible in the ruthless treatment of dissent. On 1 July, the CCP's birthday will be marked in Hong Kong with newsstands untroubled by provocative headlines in [Apple Daily](#), the last pro-democracy Chinese-language paper left in the territory. Under the [national security law](#) passed in July 2020, its owner, editor and senior writers have been arrested or convicted on charges of subversion. The paper's pro-democracy narrative has been erased, along with its quarter-century electronic archive.

Yet the chilling power politics of Leninism sits in contrast with another tradition that the CCP used to despise, but now embraces. Xi is keen to project the image of a benevolent leader who is fully in tune with the long tradition of Confucian ethics, at clear odds with his predecessor, Mao Zedong. Mao's life was dedicated to destroying the values of the old China. During Mao's rule, at the start of the Cultural Revolution, Confucius's birthplace of Qufu was [smashed to pieces](#) by Red Guards. Yet the party's hatred of Confucius began to fade just a few years after Mao's death. In 1983, [Hu Qiaomu](#), Mao's personal secretary and the hardest of hardline conservatives, even mused in the People's Daily about the need for a Confucius museum in Beijing.

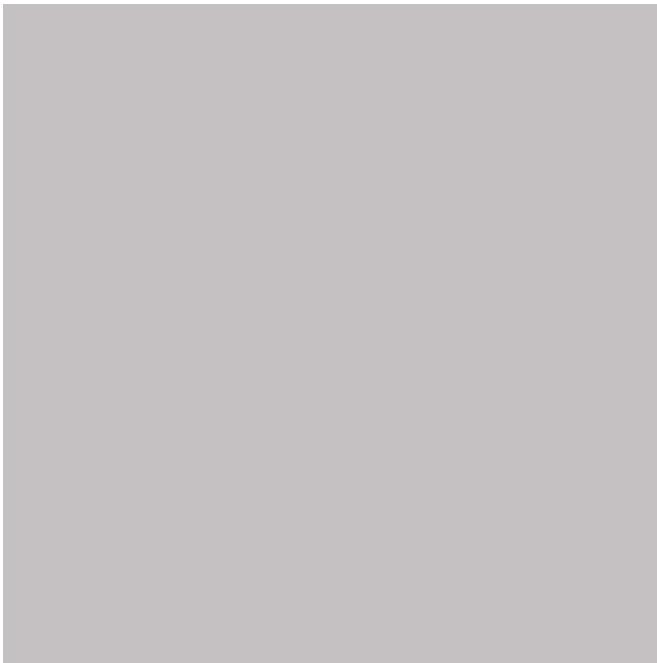
In the past 20 years, the Communist party's praise for Confucian values has become entirely mainstream. Beijing's walls are plastered with "socialist values", but the terminology is distinctly traditional, stressing ideas such as "harmony" and "integrity". The party has not developed an abstract interest in Confucianism. Rather, it sees the utility of thinking that stresses hierarchy, order and devotion to family at a time when China is prosperous but increasingly unequal. Attacking Confucius helped Mao achieve his revolution. Supporting Confucius helps Xi to prevent one.

The party's achievements over the past century are real: building the world's second-biggest economy, innovating in technology and artificial intelligence, and taking a major role in tackling climate change are neither hollow nor trivial feats. But an honest reckoning cannot ignore the parts of history that the party chooses to forget. The economic reforms of the 1980s would not have happened without the influence of [Zhao Ziyang](#), the party leader who has been scrubbed from the record after his support for the students in Tiananmen Square. The Great Leap Forward famine of 1958-62 that killed 20 million or more ended in part because of a brave party leader, [Peng Dehuai](#), who spoke out against Mao's policy and was purged. For now, the party's control over history is a powerful propaganda tool. Yet one day, archives will open, and a new, more complex history will be written that reinserts the missing characters, and shows the flaws and contradictions, as well as the successes, that make the CCP infinitely more interesting than its own sanitised narrative cares to admit.

- Rana Mitter is author of China's Good War: How World War II is Shaping a New Nationalism (2020). He teaches at Oxford University
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[OpinionLanguage](#)

We need to get rid of business jargon. Do I have your buy-in?

[Adrian Chiles](#)



I hate it when language is used to exclude and obscure. But it takes guts to resist



‘It’s almost a cliche in itself to marvel at new and terrible buzzwords.’
Photograph: Big Cheese Photo/Getty Images/Big Cheese Photo RF

‘It’s almost a cliche in itself to marvel at new and terrible buzzwords.’
Photograph: Big Cheese Photo/Getty Images/Big Cheese Photo RF

Thu 1 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

My first job in journalism was in business news. This wasn’t my first choice; in truth it would probably have been my last, but it was the only place that would have me. I was as bewildered as the next work experience bod but, since I had three weeks there, I thought I might as well try to get to the bottom of the stuff they were talking about. At school, no teacher had ever had to encourage me to put my hand up if I didn’t understand something. Invariably, my hand was raised already. My powers of concentration, severely limited at the best of times, diminish to zero if I hear words and phrases I am unfamiliar with. I have to put my hand up and seek clarification. I’m sure my teachers got tired of this, but not half as tired as the staff in the BBC’s Business Programmes department.

“What’s RPI?” I would ask.

“Inflation,” someone would explain.

“But what’s it stand for?”

“Retail Price Index.”

“Oh. And what’s RPI-X then?”

And so on.

All this came back to me when I was in conversation with the speechwriter Philip Collins about his book To Be Clear: A Style Guide for Business Writing. In it, he explores why so much business writing has become dreary, boring and incomprehensible, with all its jargon, cliches and downright absurdities. Collins pores unlovingly over an address Microsoft’s chief executive gave to his employees in 2015. Satya Nadella told his flock that their “mission is to empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more”. Every person on the planet? Really? I can’t put it better than Collins when he wonders if “every person, no matter what their passion – Benedictine monks, repertory actors doing Shakespeare, the company that has the cleaning contract for Birmingham city council, a retired crofter on Jura – there is not one of them that will not find their capacity to live the good life enhanced by Microsoft”.

[Business jargon – the 10 words to avoid at all costs](#)

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The truly terrifying thought is this: there must have been people in the audience that day who actually bought this drivel and admired the boss for sharing it with them.

It’s almost a cliche in itself to marvel at new and terrible buzzwords. When exactly was it that people started telling us they would revert rather than get back to us? When did things start being done at pace, rather than quickly? Buy-in? Core competency? What was policy based on before it was evidence-based? To search companies’ mission statements is to take a tour of Planet Cringe. My favourite so far is [McKinsey](#)’s. The promise here is to help organisations create the “Change that Matters”. The capital letters are McKinsey’s. In order to effect this Change that Matters, the consultancy explains, it partners with clients “from the C-suite to the front line”. C-suite?

That was a new one on me. Who or what is this C-suite? What does the C stand for? Well, that might depend on whether you ask somebody plying their trade on the “front line” or someone with a seat in the C-suite itself. Because it turns out the C, I was appalled to read – from between my fingers – stands for chief, as in chief executive officer, chief financial officer etc. Oh please.

The conversation with Collins was on my radio programme. It was all entertaining stuff that, judging by the texts, our listeners greatly enjoyed. Alison, a former senior employee of a bank, said that, in her experience, “jargon was the gift of the person desperate to get on without having any more talent than their peers”.

Another message unsettled me. A man in Wiltshire who had worked in several big corporations said: “The introduction of a new language, buzzwords, is a form of control. If you can get people to talk like you, you can get them to think like you.”

This is so true, and I for one have been guilty of it. Back in the day, as soon as I had learned a new bit of jargon, I would be using it at every opportunity. It was a way of showing I was a grownup and one step above whichever befuddled work-experience kid came along behind me. It’s a brave and brilliant person indeed who dares to use only the simplest language possible to make themselves clear.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

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China

Xi Jinping warns China won't be bullied in speech marking 100-year anniversary of CCP

Chinese Communist party leader warns foreign forces seeking to oppress China are on a ‘collision course’ with 1.4 billion people

00:53

Chinese president Xi says China won't be ‘bullied’ by foreigners during anniversary speech – video

*Helen Davidson in Taipei and agencies
@heldavidson*

Wed 30 Jun 2021 22.57 EDT

China will not allow “sanctimonious preaching” or bullying from foreign forces, and anyone who tries “will find themselves on a collision course with a steel wall forged by 1.4 billion people”, its president, Xi Jinping, has said on the [centenary](#) of the Chinese Communist party.

In a speech before a crowd of 70,000 in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, Xi praised the ruling party for lifting [China](#) out of poverty and humiliation, and pledged to expand China’s military and influence.

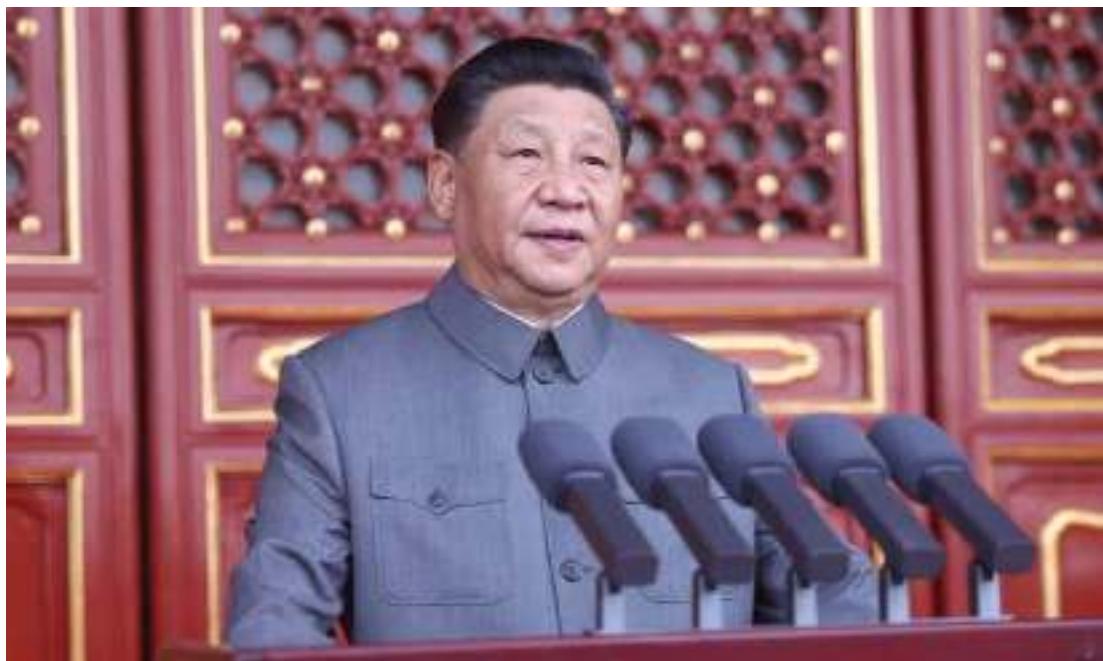
Standing at the Gate of Heavenly Peace above a portrait of Mao Zedong on Thursday, Xi said the era of China being bullied was “gone forever”.

[‘Making China great again’: pomp and propaganda as CCP marks centenary](#)
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“We will not accept sanctimonious preaching from those who feel they have the right to lecture us,” he said. “We have never bullied, oppressed, or subjugated the people of any other country, and we never will.”

“By the same token we will never allow anyone to bully, oppress, or subjugate [China]. Anyone who tries will find them on a collision course with a steel wall forged by 1.4 billion people.”

His fiery statements were met with rapturous applause by the tens of thousands of Chinese Communist party (CCP) members in attendance.



Xi Jinping delivers a speech at a ceremony marking the centenary of the CCP in Beijing. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

The CCP wields absolute rule over 1.4 billion people and one of the world's largest economies. But China is also an increasingly isolated member of the international community due to its human rights abuses and actions towards regional neighbours such as Taiwan, India and others who dispute China's claims in the South China Sea. Its relations with countries like the US, Canada, and Australia – with which it is locked in bitter trade disputes – are at their lowest points in decades.

In his speech, Xi said a strong country must have a strong military to guarantee the security of the nation, and the People's Liberation Army had made “indelible achievements”. It was a “strong pillar” for safeguarding the country and preserving national dignity, sovereignty and development interests, not just in [China](#) but in the region “and beyond”, he said.

The party must maintain “absolute leadership” over the military, which must be grown and elevated “to world-class standards”, he said.

There is increasing concern and preparation for the eventuation of military confrontation over Taiwan, likely involving the US which supplies arms to the island’s government.

In his speech Xi reiterated longstanding pledges to “restore” Taiwan. The CCP has never ruled over Taiwan but considers it to be a breakaway province of China that must be unified, by force if necessary. Xi said this remained an “unshakeable commitment”.

“No one should underestimate the resolve, the will and ability of the Chinese people to define their national sovereignty and territorial integrity,” he said.

Given [recent context](#), Xi’s comments on Taiwan weren’t unexpected, said Dr Mark Harrison, senior lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Tasmania, but they did show how “uncompromising” Beijing was.

“Xi restated the existing formulations for Taiwan of Beijing’s one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus but his tone was notably belligerent, including his line ‘to utterly defeat any attempt towards Taiwan independence’,” he said.

Taiwan’s China policy-making Mainland Affairs Council said Taiwan’s people have rejected the one-China principle, and Beijing should abandon its military intimidation and talk with Taipei on an equal footing.

“Our government’s determination to firmly defend the nation’s sovereignty and Taiwan’s democracy and freedom and to maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait remains unchanged.”

The Council said while the CCP had achieved “certain economic development”, it remained a dictatorship that trampled on people’s freedoms, and should embrace democracy instead.

“Its historical decision-making errors and persistent harmful actions have caused serious threats to regional security,” it added.

[The Guardian view on the Chinese Communist party at 100: what does the next century hold? | Editorial](#)

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Xi's speech charted the history of the CCP from its origins in Shanghai in 1921, to its place today, declaring it had achieved its first centenary goal of building a "moderately prosperous society in all respects", and claiming to have eradicated poverty.

"We eliminated the exploitative feudal system that had persisted in [China](#) for thousands of years and established socialism," he said. "The Chinese people are not only good at destroying an old world, but also good at building a new world. Only socialism can save China, and only socialism with Chinese characteristics can develop [China](#)."

Xi said without the party there would be no new China, and it had "profoundly transformed the advancement of the Chinese nation".

"It is the foundation and lifeblood of the party and the country, and the crux upon which the interests and wellbeing of all Chinese people depend."

Xi has cemented his eight-year rule through a personality cult, ending term limits and declining to anoint a successor. He has purged rivals and crushed dissent – from Uyghur Muslims and online critics to pro-democracy protests on Hong Kong's streets.

The centenary celebrations have been a highly orchestrated affair, with little prior announcement of what was on the cards. Thursday's event began with dozens of military helicopters and jets, including the J-20 stealth fighters, flying in formation through Beijing's skies, trailing flags and coloured smoke over Tiananmen Square, where 56 cannon – representing the 56 ethnic groups of China – were fired 100 times.

['They can't speak freely': Hong Kong a year after the national security law](#)
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Last week, surveillance and security measures increased and Reuters reported police officers door-knocking to check household registrations, and

tightened censorship directives at Bytedance and Baidu.

Thursday also marks the 24th anniversary of the handover of former British colony Hong Kong to China, a date once met with mass demonstrations against Beijing.

Thousands of police were deployed in an effort to prevent a repeat of protests on Thursday, which also marked one year and one day since the implementation of the national security law, a draconian legal tool which authorities have been accused of wielding to crush dissent and opposition.

“While safeguarding national security, residents continue to enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly and demonstration and others according to the law,” deputy chief executive John Lee said in a speech.

Hong Kong police later cordoned off Victoria Park citing public order laws, and evicted all occupants including children playing sport. “The most effective police measure is to prevent things that could happen rather than to deal with it after it happens,” said a police spokesman.

Agence France-Presse and Reuters contributed to this report

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China

China building more than 100 ‘nuclear’ missile silos in desert

Satellite footage shows ‘alarming development’ that signals possible expansion of nuclear capabilities



Chinese military vehicles carrying DF-41 ballistic missiles drive past flag-waving spectators during a parade in Beijing. Photograph: AP

Chinese military vehicles carrying DF-41 ballistic missiles drive past flag-waving spectators during a parade in Beijing. Photograph: AP

Helen Davidson in Taipei

@heldavidson

Thu 1 Jul 2021 05.40 EDT

China is building more than 100 missile silos in the desert, according to an analysis of satellite photos, which researchers say signals a possible expansion of the country’s nuclear capabilities.

Analysts warned the expansion signified an “alarming development” but also urged caution against “worst-case thinking”, noting tension between major nuclear powers over disarmament.

The research, first reported by [the Washington Post](#) on Thursday, identified the construction of at least 119 silos, likely to hold intercontinental ballistic missiles, have been identified in the desert of Gansu province.

The researchers, from the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, made the discovery through an analysis of satellite photos provided by commercial company, Planet.

Spread across more than 700 sq miles, the site near Yumen includes the construction of underground bunkers, which may function as launch centres, cable trenches, roads and a small military base, one of the researchers, the US nuclear expert Jeffrey Lewis, said.

Features of the layout mirrored existing nuclear ballistic missile launch sites in Inner Mongolia, suggesting China has built or is building at least 145 in total.

“We believe China is expanding its nuclear forces in part to maintain a deterrent that can survive a US first strike in sufficient numbers to defeat US missile defences,” Lewis told the Washington Post.

China is believed to have about 350 nuclear warheads, about 30 more than in 2020, and far fewer than the US or Russia, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Amid an arms race and worsening relations with Washington, China and Russia are [reluctant to reduce their arsenal](#) without corresponding limits on the US. In April the head of US nuclear forces had warned of an “breathtaking expansion” of Chinese nuclear capabilities.

The number of silos does not necessarily correlate with the number of missiles, with Lewis suggesting it could be a “shell game” to partially disguise where missiles are kept and ensure other parties in a war would not

know exactly where they were. He said the layout was similar to what the US designed when it made initial “shell game” plans in the 1970s.

“So while it might seem that 120 silos means 120 missiles, it could very easily be 12. We just don’t know. And even if China were to deploy only a handful of missiles, its forces could over time grow into the silos,” Lewis told [Foreign Policy](#). “Yet whether the number is 12 or 120, this is an alarming development.”

After last month’s Nato meeting warned of a need to address China’s growing authoritarianism and military might, Beijing accused the bloc of “slander” and made specific mention of its nuclear arsenal.

China’s mission to the EU said the country had far fewer nuclear warheads than Nato members and had committed not to use or threaten their use against non-nuclear states.

It said China was committed to a defence policy that was “defensive in nature”, and its pursuit of military modernisation was justified and reasonable. In early June, China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, said the country adheres to a principle of not using nuclear weapons first.

James Acton, a co-director of the nuclear policy programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, urged against “worst-case thinking” in light of the silo construction revelations.

“There are lots of reasons to question whether China is about to expand its nuclear arsenal this rapidly, although it is expanding it a bit,” Acton said, noting the similarity to the US’s 1970s shell game plan.

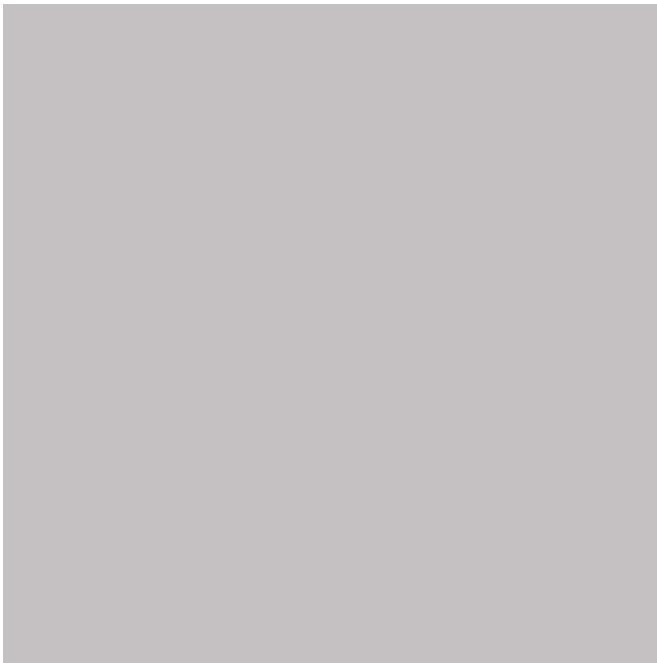
“Secondly, understand that to a large extent China’s nuclear modernisation programme may be motivated by concern about the US. China has been quite open that it worries the US might attack its nuclear forces preemptively in a conflict.”

John Culver, a retired CIA analyst on east Asian affairs, questioned the closeness of the constructed buildings. “Grouped so closely they

situationally almost dare an adversary to think about counterforce attack,” he tweeted.

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New Zealand

New Zealand has lost thousands of hectares of wetlands in past decades, study shows

Country has just 10% of its wetlands left, endangering fragile ecosystems home to threatened species



Lagoon near Napier. New Zealand has lost 90% of its wetlands since colonisation, new research shows. Photograph: DEA/G. SIOEN/De Agostini/Getty Images

Lagoon near Napier. New Zealand has lost 90% of its wetlands since colonisation, new research shows. Photograph: DEA/G. SIOEN/De Agostini/Getty Images

Eva Corlett in Wellington
Thu 1 Jul 2021 02.03 EDT

Thousands of hectares of New Zealand's wetlands have been lost in the past twenty years, leaving the country with just 10% of its pre-European wetland

areas and posing significant risks for biodiversity, according to new research.

Wetlands are considered “high value” ecosystems in New Zealand and are home to a disproportionately large number of threatened birds and animals, including 67% of freshwater and estuarine fish, and 13% of endangered plants. They also play important roles capturing carbon, maintaining water quality, regulating atmospheric gases, and are culturally significant to Māori.

Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research has collated and revised data from across two databases: their own New Zealand Land Cover Database and Fresh Water Environment of New Zealand’s Wetlands of National Importance Database, to better map the degradation of freshwater wetlands.

[By failing to protect our water we have failed everything New Zealanders value | Tom Kay](#)

[Read more](#)

Both databases use different mapping technologies, which on their own are considered insufficient to comprehensively track wetland areas, the paper’s principal author John R Dymond said.

The revised data shows an “alarming” 6,000 hectares of freshwater wetlands have vanished in the past two decades, Dymond said. That might not sound like much but it represents a disturbing trend, he said.

The overall 90% loss of wetlands across the country – which adds up to 2.25 million hectares – is considered large by global comparisons, which is reported at about 50%, though in some European countries it sits closer to New Zealand’s figures.

The Ministry of the Environment will be assessing what is contributing to the loss over the next year, but agricultural practices are “most certainly” the main drivers, Dymond said.

It could be impossible to reverse the devastation of the historical wetlands, with many situated on privately owned land now devoted to agriculture, he said, but the existing wetlands can still be protected.

“It’s a matter of holding on to the wetlands we have and improving the condition and connectivity of the wetlands. Quite a few of them are disconnected and the fish can’t get to them.”

The revised wetland maps do not include sites that are less than 0.5 hectares. While these small areas are predicted to make up just a fraction of the overall wetland area in New Zealand, Dymond said these tiny scattered areas have huge ecological significance.

“A lot of those small ones have unique biodiversity and we don’t know what is being lost,” he said.

[‘Their birthright is being lost’: New Zealanders fret over polluted rivers](#)
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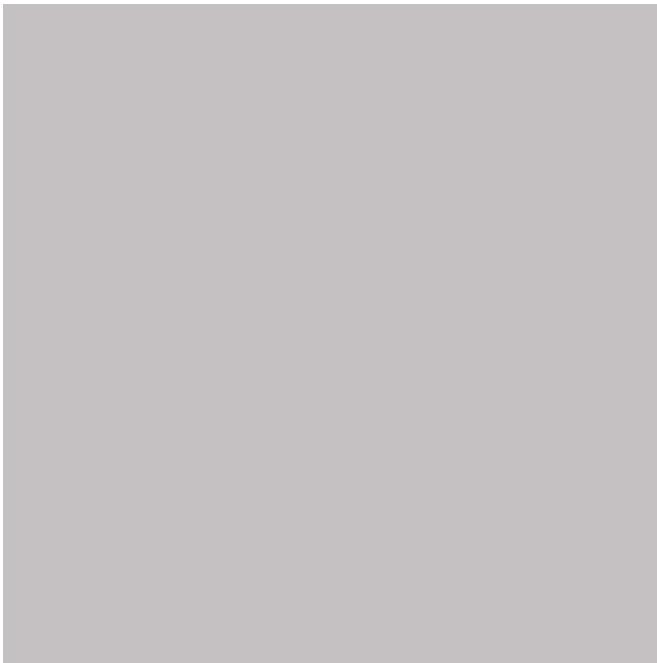
Last year, [the government introduced](#) freshwater environmental reforms, including standards to stop wetland areas from being exposed to further degradation.

But it is difficult to know what to protect when the mapping is poor.

Wetlands, despite their importance and fragility, have been mapped and monitored in a piecemeal fashion since records began, Dymond said, adding that it is critical the method is nationalised to better inform policy and regulatory decision-making, and maintain accurate environmental reporting.

The new government standards require local councils to map the millions of sites larger than 0.05 hectares, which Dymond said will come at a huge financial cost. He suggested that small wetlands are mapped on a case-by-case basis, when a property is being inspected for resource consent.

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[Donald Trump](#)

Trump Organization executive surrenders to face charges in tax investigation

Allen Weisselberg prepares to face charges in tax-related investigation at pivotal moment for ex-president



The Trump Organization chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, right, as Donald Trump speaks at a news conference at Trump Tower in Manhattan in 2016. Photograph: Carlo Allegri/Reuters

The Trump Organization chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, right, as Donald Trump speaks at a news conference at Trump Tower in Manhattan in 2016. Photograph: Carlo Allegri/Reuters

*[Dominic Rushe](#) in New York and agency
[@dominicrue](#)*

Thu 1 Jul 2021 10.41 EDT

The Trump Organization's chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, has surrendered to the Manhattan district attorney's office as he and the Trump family business prepare to face criminal charges in a tax-related investigation.

Weisselberg, who has worked for the Trump family for nearly 50 years, entered a building housing Manhattan's criminal court, where he and a Trump Organization representative are expected to appear later in the day. His lawyers said he would plead not guilty and would fight the charges.

These are the first criminal charges against the former president's company since prosecutors began investigating it three years ago, and represent a pivotal moment in the escalating battle between [New York](#) prosecutors and the former president.

The exact charges against Weisselberg and the Trump Organization are not yet known but are expected to involve alleged tax violations related to benefits the company gave to top executives, possibly including the use of apartments and cars and school tuition, people familiar with the case said.

While no charges were expected to be brought against Trump personally, they mark an extraordinary turning point and more are likely to follow.

[New York](#) prosecutors are still investigating allegations of "hush money" paid to women who say they had sexual relations with Trump, and claims of real-estate price manipulation. Trump denies wrongdoing and calls the investigations a "witch-hunt" by politically motivated prosecutors.

The charges are also a severe blow to the Trump Organization, which may now find it more difficult to raise money as the case continues. They also pose a challenge to Trump's apparent political ambitions. Trump has begun a series of [campaign-style rallies](#) and is positioning himself for another run at the presidency in 2024.

Prosecutors had been pressing Weisselberg, 73, to cooperate with their investigations but with little success until now.

No one apart from the former president has such a thorough knowledge of the Trump Organization. “They are like Batman and Robin,” Jennifer Weisselberg, the ex-wife of Allen Weisselberg’s son Barry, [told the New York Times](#). Jennifer Weisselberg has aided the Manhattan district attorney Cyrus Vance’s investigation into Trump’s business after a contentious divorce, supplying hundreds of pages of tax documents.

Trump’s former lawyer Michael Cohen testified before Congress in 2019 that Weisselberg helped orchestrate a cover-up to [reimburse him for a \\$130,000 payment](#) made to the adult film actor Stormy Daniels, who has claimed she had sex with Trump.

Cohen also testified that he and Weisselberg concocted phoney valuations of Trump’s real estate holdings to devalue assets for tax purposes while inflating them for loan agreements. Vance and the New York state attorney general, Letitia James, are investigating both allegations.

A grand jury was recently empaneled to weigh evidence and James said she was assigning two of her lawyers to work with Vance on the criminal inquiry while she continued a civil investigation of Trump.

The Manhattan district attorney’s office did not respond to a request for comment from the Guardian.

In a statement the Trump Organization called Weisselberg “a loving and devoted husband, father and grandfather” who was “being used by the Manhattan district attorney as a pawn in a scorched earth attempt to harm the former president”.

“This is not justice; this is politics,” the statement read.

Trump had blasted the investigation in a statement Monday, deriding Vance’s office as “rude, nasty, and totally biased”.

Trump Organization lawyers met virtually with Manhattan prosecutors last week in a last-ditch attempt to dissuade them from charging the company. Prosecutors gave the lawyers [a Monday deadline](#) to make the case that criminal charges should not be filed.

Ronald Fischetti, a lawyer for the Trump Organization, told the Associated Press this week that there was no indication Trump was included in the first batch of charges. “There is no indictment coming down this week against the former president,” Fischetti said. “I can’t say he’s out of the woods yet completely.”

[Allen Weisselberg: half of the dynamic duo running Trump's business empire](#)

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Weisselberg, a loyal lieutenant to Trump and his real estate developer father, Fred, came under scrutiny in part because of questions about his son’s use of a Trump apartment at little or no cost.

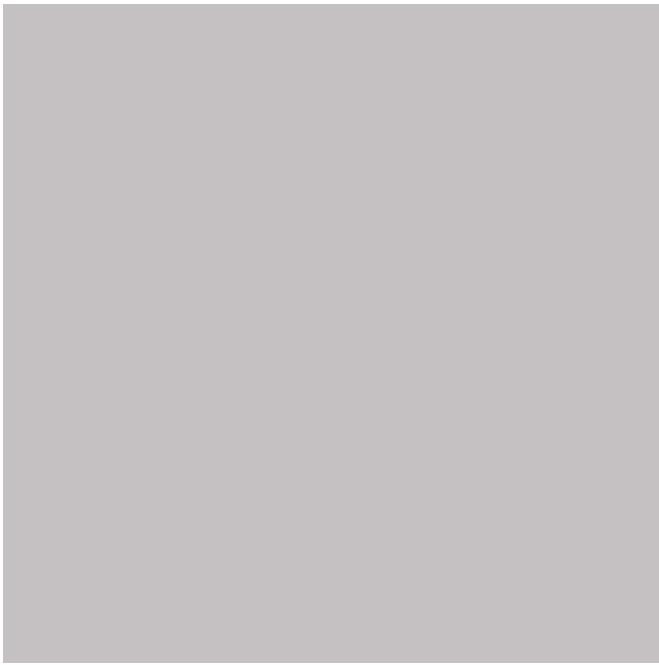
Prosecutors investigating untaxed benefits to Trump executives have also been looking at Matthew Calamari, a former Trump bodyguard turned chief operating officer, and his son, the company’s corporate director of security. A lawyer for the Calamaris said on Wednesday that he did not expect them to be charged.

“Although the DA’s investigation obviously is ongoing, I do not expect charges to be filed against either of my clients at this time,” said the lawyer, Nicholas Gravante.

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Labour

Starmer hails Labour revival after Kim Leadbeater wins Batley and Spen

The sister of the murdered MP Jo Cox holds West Yorkshire seat for party by 323 votes

- [UK politics live – latest news](#)

01:09

Keir Starmer hails Kim Leadbeater's victory in Batley and Spen – video

[Maya Wolfe-Robinson](#), [Peter Walker](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)

Fri 2 Jul 2021 07.59 EDT

Labour “is coming home” after the party narrowly held on to Batley and Spen in a sometimes brutal byelection, [Keir Starmer](#) has said, arguing that voters were starting to see through the government’s “politics of misinformation”.

“It is a start. Labour is back. Labour is coming home,” the party leader told cheering activists in the West Yorkshire constituency, standing next to Kim Leadbeater, who won the seat over the [Conservatives](#) by just 323 votes.

Leadbeater, the sister of Jo Cox, who represented the seat from 2015 until her murder by a far-right extremist in 2016, took 13,296 votes, against 12,973 for the Tory candidate, Ryan Stephenson

George Galloway, who stood under the banner of his Workers Party of Britain with the explicit aim of splitting the Labour vote and destabilising

Starmer's leadership, came third with 8,264 votes.

Speaking to activists and the media in the constituency, Starmer condemned the abuse Leadbeater had faced during the campaign, saying others had “poisoned it with hatred, division, disinformation, lies, harassment, threats and intimidation”.

00:43

Labour's Kim Leadbeater narrowly wins Batley and Spen byelection – video

While much of his message was aimed at Galloway, Starmer condemned the Conservatives for believing “they could sit back, say nothing about harassment, and walk in. And they were wrong about that.”

Speaking to Sky News, Starmer sought to more explicitly link a “victory of hope over division and decency over hatred” to the government, saying a number of Tory voters had switched to [Labour](#).

Asked if the result was affected by the resignation of Matt Hancock for breaching Covid rules during an affair with an aide, Starmer said: “I think people are getting fed up with the politics of misinformation, half-truths, untruths and division.”

The result, which Labour had feared would not go its way, was declared at about 5.25am on Friday after two “bundle checks” – not a full recount, but where the piles of votes are flicked through for irregularities. The result eases the pressure on Starmer, after a humiliating [defeat in Hartlepool](#) in May.

Leadbeater, 45, said she was “absolutely delighted that the people of Batley and Spen have rejected division and they've voted for hope”. In a short victory speech, she thanked her family and friends, saying “without them I could not have got through the last five years, never mind the last five weeks”.

She singled out the children of her sister, who was killed while doing the job she had just been elected to do. “I want to give a special shout out to my

niece and nephew who I cannot wait to hug as soon as I see them,” she said.

She also thanked the police, whom she said “sadly I have needed more than ever” during the campaign, which she said had highlighted how much work there was to do in the constituency.

Speaking later on BBC Breakfast on Friday morning, Leadbeater acknowledged the bitterness of the campaign, during which she needed police protection at times.

“Sadly there has been some nastiness during this byelection, and there are some divisions that need to be healed, but I think if anyone can achieve that, I can,” she said.

Labour activists said they were pelted with eggs and kicked in the head on the campaign trail at the weekend. West Yorkshire police said an 18-year-old man from Batley was arrested on suspicion of assault in connection with an attack on canvassers.

Labour was defending a slender majority of 3,525 votes in a seat it has held since 1997. The byelection was called after the previous MP Tracy Brabin was elected as the first mayor of West Yorkshire.

Turnout was 47.61%, down from 66.5% at the 2019 general election, although by-elections generally record fewer voters. In May’s by-election in Hartlepool, turnout was 42.55%.

The demographic picture in Batley and Spen is more diverse than in Hartlepool. About 20% of the population is of south Asian heritage. A poll released this month by the Labour Muslim Network said that while Muslim voters traditionally backed Labour, support for the party was waning, as were Starmer’s personal ratings.

Keir Starmer popularity

A senior Labour source called it “a fantastic result”, adding: “Everyone’s been calling this a referendum on Keir’s leadership. Well we’ve won – bucked the trend, held on to this marginal seat and advanced in Tory areas.”

Brendan Cox, the widower of Jo Cox, tweeted: “We are all incredibly proud of #kimleadbeater today and Jo would have been too. While the result between the two main parties was close the extremists & haters were left trailing. The people of Batley & Spen have voted for decency and positivity once again.”

There were 16 candidates on the ballot, including several far-right candidates.

George Galloway, who came third in the contest, said he would apply to have the result set aside by the courts.

This article was amended on 2 July 2021 to correct Kim Leadbeater’s age from 44 to 45.

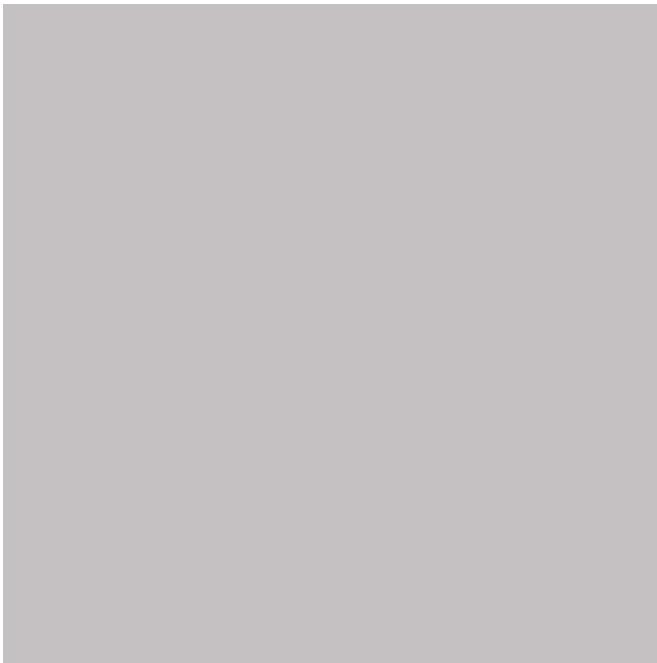
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Batley and Spen byelection: Keir Starmer hails ‘victory of hope over division’ – as it happened

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Anger over Hancock affair a factor in byelection defeat, says Tory co-chair

Amanda Milling says row over ex-health secretary's conduct contributed to Batley and Spen loss

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Amanda Milling described the Batley and Spen byelection loss as 'disappointing'. Photograph: MI News/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Amanda Milling described the Batley and Spen byelection loss as 'disappointing'. Photograph: MI News/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Ben Quinn](#)
[@BenQuinn75](#)*

Fri 2 Jul 2021 04.17 EDT

Public anger at Matt Hancock's breach of social distancing rules with an aide with whom he had started an affair was a factor in the Conservative party's "disappointing" failure to win the Batley and Spen byelection, the party's co-chair has conceded.

Amanda Milling was speaking on the morning after [Kim Leadbeater took the seat for Labour](#) after she received 13,296 votes, a majority of 323 over the Tory candidate, Ryan Stephenson.

"It was something that came up on the doorstep, I have to be honest about that," Milling told Sky News after being asked if public anger at the former health secretary's behaviour had cost the party votes.

"They had some issues over the weekend in terms of what happened. Matt resigned and that was the right thing to do," she said.

Describing the result as "disappointing", Milling said the government had faced an uphill task to take the seat, which was vacated by its previous MP, Tracy Brabin, after she was [elected as the region's metro mayor](#).

After a desperate last-ditch effort to hang on to his job, Hancock resigned after he [was pictured in an embrace](#) at his office with Gina Coladangelo, a longtime friend and a non-executive director at the department of the then secretary of state for health, on 6 May.

Labour's national campaign coordinator, Shabana Mahmood, hailed Leadbeater's win as a "fantastic result for the [Labour](#) party and a richly deserved win".

She told BBC Breakfast: "This was a collective effort. I was so pleased to see so many campaigners across the country. It was an election where local issues were at the heart of it. It was local and national, but Kim is a local woman and she's the only candidate in this election who lived in that area."

Asked about the performance of George Galloway, who came third and took more than 8,000 votes during a campaign in which he targeted voters in

traditionally Labour areas with the aim of toppling the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, Mahmood called his conduct “hateful and divisive” and said it had “made people afraid of one another”.

Leadbeater would “advocate and represent local interests” when it came to Palestine and human rights abuses in Kashmir, Mahmood said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jul/02/anger-hancock-affair-byelection-defeat-tory-batley-and-spen-health-secretary>.

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Byelections

Leadbeater's slim by-election win offers sweet relief for Starmer

Analysis: ominous chatter over a possible Labour leadership bid will stop abruptly – for now at least

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00:43

Labour's Kim Leadbeater narrowly wins Batley and Spen by-election – video

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Fri 2 Jul 2021 02.22 EDT

Labour MPs who have campaigned hard for Kim Leadbeater in Batley and Spen over recent days say her narrow 323 vote victory in Thursday's by-election is very much hers.

A committed local activist who has worked to bring her local community together since her MP sister, [Jo Cox](#), was murdered there by extremists in 2016, she dealt calmly and resolutely with the rigours of a nasty campaign.

Indeed, party strategists believe it was partly the public's revulsion at unsettling images of Leadbeater being heckled that helped bring voters out to support her, even from traditionally Conservative areas of the seat.

Even on Thursday, Labour MPs contacted by the Guardian as they poured into Batley for a get-out-the vote drive in the sunshine remained pessimistic, so her narrow victory came as a sweet relief.

Had Leadbeater lost, however, such is the brutal nature of Westminster politics that it would have been read by many backbench MPs not as her personal defeat, but Keir Starmer's.

The Labour leader has come under consistent friendly fire in recent weeks for failing to offer a convincingly clear message about what the party stands for, or to narrow Boris Johnson's poll lead despite a string of revelations about sleaze.

Many MPs have privately been offering gloomy prognostications in recent days about the dire state of their party, and some were preparing to urge colleagues to launch a leadership challenge.

Keir Starmer popularity

There were even suggestions Labour could come third, behind George Galloway – way wide of the mark in the event, since Leadbeater took 13,296 votes, her Conservative rival Ryan Stephenson 12,973 and Galloway 8,264.

So febrile was the mood in recent days that even Starmer's deputy, Angela Rayner, was being mooted as a candidate, and was forced to deny any knowledge of plans for a leadership bid on Thursday – though she did not quite rule out launching one.

Rayner was regarded by many on the left of the party as the only person likely to win over the 40 MPs necessary to launch a bid; but there were also ominous rumblings from more centrist MPs about how long Starmer could viably last had Labour lost Batley and Spen.

All that chatter will now stop abruptly, at least for the time being. MPs and party members are likely to feel Starmer has earned himself the benefit of the doubt – though his new leadership team know he has a hard road ahead to Labour's autumn conference.

Leadbeater's narrow victory, turning the seat into a super-marginal, suggests the electoral tide may still be moving against Labour – Tracy Brabin's majority in the 2019 general election was more than 3,500.

The fact that Galloway was able to convince 8,000 voters to support him by playing on Starmer's alleged neglect of the Muslim community is also likely to stoke fears that Labour is alienating once-loyal groups of voters.

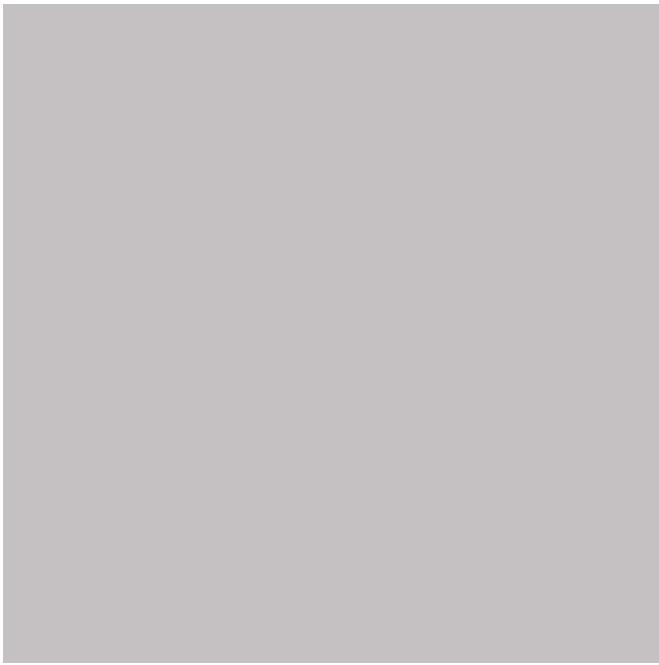
But Starmer now has a clear run to get on with what he has been promising his party he is ready to do: get out to the voters and convince them Labour would improve their lives, and he would make a better prime minister than Johnson.

And, meanwhile, Labour MPs who still feel keenly the loss of their friend Jo Cox will be able to welcome her sister into Cox's old seat on the green benches of the House of Commons.

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Coronavirus

‘We are a petri dish’: world watches UK’s race between vaccine and virus

Analysis: UK stands alone in pitting advanced vaccination programme against fast-spreading Delta variant

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People queuing for the first dose of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine being offered to adults over the age of 18 at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. Photograph: Steve Taylor/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

People queuing for the first dose of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine being offered to adults over the age of 18 at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. Photograph: Steve Taylor/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Ian Sample Science editor
[@iansample](https://twitter.com/iansample)

Fri 2 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Not for the first time in the coronavirus pandemic, the UK finds itself in a unique position. Through a combination of history, biology, mathematics and politics, the country stands alone in pitting an advanced vaccination programme against a substantial wave of Covid driven almost entirely by the fast-spreading Delta variant.

Nowhere in the world is the race between vaccination and virus more keenly watched than here.

Other countries – and Israel stands out – have vaccinated more of their population. India has endured more Delta cases.

But much of North America, Europe and Asia are behind the UK with their vaccine programmes and are only now seeing Delta take hold.

The World [Health](#) Organization believes Delta will become dominant. The variant accounts for a fifth of new cases in the US and but expected to dominate within weeks. After a 10-week decline, cases are rising in Europe. In France, the government's lead science adviser, Prof Jean-François Delfraissy, has warned of a fourth wave driven by the variant.

“The UK is in an absolutely unique position,” says Mark Woolhouse, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh. “We have the biggest Delta outbreak in a well-vaccinated country. We are a petri dish for the world.”

There is plenty other countries can learn from what happens in the UK in the coming months. Most obvious is how the variant spreads in the population and what impact different vaccines, and different levels of vaccination, have on cases, hospitalisations and deaths.

Analysis by Public Health England has already shown the variant to be about 60% more transmissible than the Alpha, or Kent, variant and perhaps twice as likely to hospitalise people. Countries looking on will want to know who are the people needing hospital care, who needs mechanical ventilation, who dies, and in what numbers.

There is already some good news. While the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines aren't quite as effective against Delta as they are against the Alpha variant, particularly after one dose, two shots reduce the risk of hospitalisation from Delta infections by 96% and 92% respectively. This is hugely welcome and gives countries a handle on what's to come.

"People will undoubtedly look at the UK and learn as much as they can from our experience," says Prof David Salisbury, former director of immunisation at the Department of Health and assistant fellow on the Global Health Programme at Chatham House.

"If the UK has a certain percentage of people double vaccinated and France has a third less, they might extrapolate to what that could mean for them. I'm sure that's what public health people will be doing in many countries when they look at the UK data."

Perhaps the most crucial question is this: can vaccination break the link between Delta variant infection and hospitalisation, or between infection and death?

The concept of breaking the link entirely makes more sense in epidemiology textbooks than in the real world.

While vaccines massively reduce the risk of death, they do not reduce it to zero, and they do far less to prevent infection. When a highly transmissible variant such as Delta is in circulation, it will still have a good chance of spreading widely and finding those people who are unvaccinated, or not-well protected from their shots.

How well it does this in the UK will alert other countries to how threatened their own vaccination programmes may be.

"The link cannot be entirely broken unless you have eradicated the virus," says Salisbury. "If the virus is still in circulation, there have to be some consequences from it."

All of which leads to the related question of what proportion of the population needs to be vaccinated to crush a national epidemic – and is this even achievable?

Israel originally pushed down on cases with aggressive vaccination, but cases have risen again with the arrival of the Delta variant.

For now, Israel is keen to watch and wait, to see if cases rise, but not severe illness. But while Israel relies largely on the Pfizer vaccine, the UK has bet on Oxford/AstraZeneca.

For that reason, other countries that are banking on the cheaper, more easily stored Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine will be watching the UK. “If the UK avoids serious damage it will be important for those countries that have been relying on Oxford/AstraZeneca,” says William Hanage, a professor of the evolution and epidemiology of infectious disease at Harvard.

To crush an epidemic of Delta variant, scientists believe 85% of the population need to be protected by a vaccine that prevents all onward transmission.

But that assumes the virus is allowed to let rip with no other measures to control it. “At the moment we clearly haven’t vaccinated enough people to stop the virus circulating,” says Woolhouse.

“What that tells you is we are not at the herd immunity threshold yet. The delta variant, being more transmissible, has raised the bar.”

Countries looking on will want to see how the UK handles this dilemma. Vaccination and the immunity people have from past infection will get us a long way, but more measures are likely to be needed to eventually control the epidemic.

Siân Griffiths, emeritus professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the co-chair of the Hong Kong government’s inquiry into Sars, says south-east Asian countries are watching the UK, along with Israel, to see how they cope with Delta.

Many of these countries went for a zero-Covid approach and have extremely low vaccination rates. They are now seeing cases of Delta variant spring up and will need to throw more into vaccination. “What you’re seeing is a gradual realisation that it isn’t going to be a world without Covid,” she says.

As the UK goes into the autumn, a combined Covid and flu vaccination programme may swing into action, giving time for Australia, New Zealand and other countries in the southern hemisphere to see the impact before their winter arrives.

But there are behavioural lessons to be had too. While the UK has worrying inequalities around who takes up the vaccine, coverage across the population is the envy of the world.

“Many countries are trying out different ways to get people to come forward,” says Griffiths. “They might want to look at why the UK has come forward for vaccination in the numbers it has.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/02/we-are-a-petri-dish-world-watches-uks-race-between-vaccine-and-virus>



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[Coronavirus](#)

Australia to halve international arrival cap as Scott Morrison unveils four-stage Covid exit plan

Prime minister says it may take until 2022 before moving to next phase, which would see focus on reducing hospitalisations rather than coronavirus cases

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02:11

Morrison announces reduction in international arrivals, defends confusing vaccine remarks – video

Daniel Hurst
[@danielhurstbne](#)

Fri 2 Jul 2021 02.01 EDT

The number of international flight arrivals into Australia will be halved nationwide in a blow to Australians stranded abroad, while [Scott Morrison](#) attempts to reassure the public that the federal government is working with states and territories on a plan out of the Covid crisis.

The prime minister called on Australians to “get vaccinated” in order to “change how we live as a country” – but he indicated it might take until next year to reach the next stage of the four-stage opening-up plan.

The cuts to caps on international arrivals aim to reduce the pressure on hotel quarantine facilities and are in line with increasingly loud [calls from a number of states](#) – but the move was not the preferred approach of the New South Wales premier, Gladys Berejiklian, nor Morrison.

[Scott Morrison has announced a four-phase pathway out of Covid, so what's in Australia's pandemic exit plan?](#)

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Speaking after a meeting with state and territory leaders on Friday, Morrison said the [halving of the caps](#) would not necessarily prevent further breaches of infection control – but “it is believed that is a prudent action” because of the increased infectiousness of the Delta variant.

That will see the weekly cap on international passenger arrivals into Australia tighten from 6,070 to 3,035 by 14 July. Within those numbers, the cap on arrivals into Sydney – which takes about half of all arrivals into Australia – will go from 3,010 to 1,505.

Morrison said leaders wanted to “try to minimise the disruption for people with already planned flights”. There are currently 34,000 Australians registered with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as wishing to return from overseas.

People arriving on federal government-organised flights into Australia, and who quarantine for two weeks at the Howard Springs site in the Northern Territory, are already outside the flight cap numbers, so those arrivals are unaffected by the announcement.

Morrison said the federal government would seek to “ramp up” the number of people arriving on facilitated flights in the coming weeks, noting there had been “a dip in demand” on such flights in recent times.

He conceded the planned increase in the use of Howard Springs “can’t fully ameliorate the impact of the reduction of 50%, particularly out of Sydney” – but he rejected the suggestion it would be a “drop in the ocean”.

He praised NSW for its “extraordinary effort” in carrying half the load of returning Australians. He also said the government planned to “trial and pilot with individual jurisdictions, the introduction of alternative quarantine options, including home quarantine for returning vaccinated travellers”.

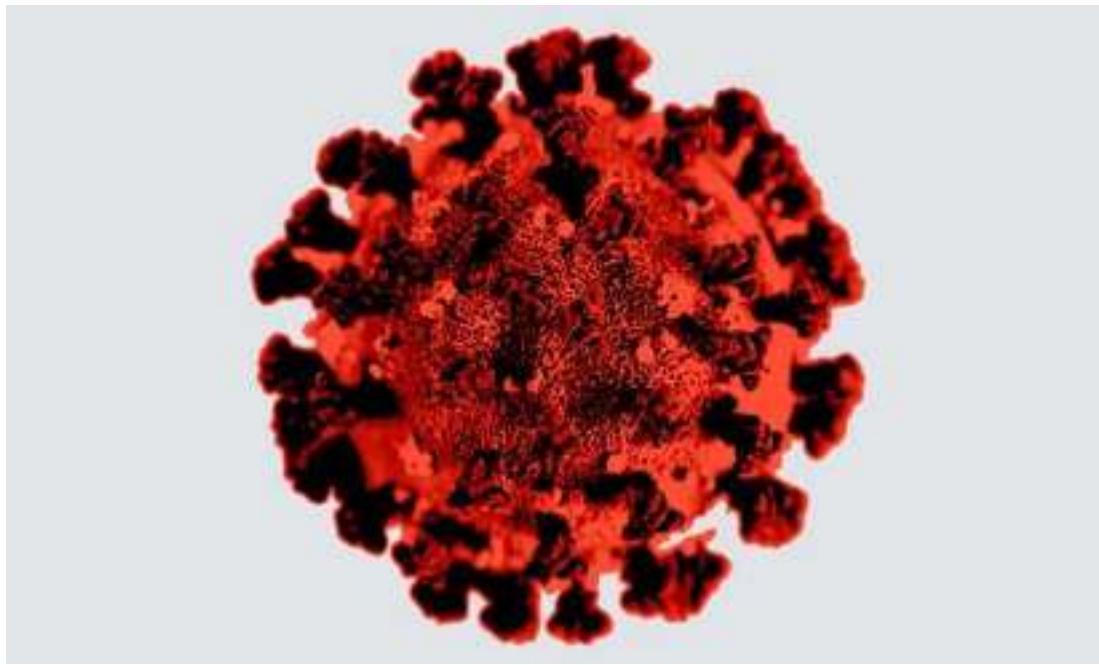
Morrison used the post-national cabinet press conference – his first since leaving home quarantine at the Lodge in Canberra after his overseas travel – to attempt to give Australians a sense of hope about moving away from lockdowns and internal border closures, albeit not in the short term.

Amid mounting pressure over the federal government’s handling of the [vaccination rollout](#), Morrison said the national cabinet had discussed “a new deal for Australians today to get us to the other side” of the pandemic.

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With large parts of Australia [currently locked down](#), and with vaccination coverage still low, he said there was “still quite a journey ahead of us” and the nation was currently in the first of the four stages, focused on suppressing the community transmission.

The thresholds for moving to the next stages would be based on vaccination rates, but national cabinet has yet to reach agreement on what the triggers will be.

The triggers would be based on expert scientific advice and modelling, Morrison said, not “political deals”. He believed the government would be in a position by the end of this year to have offered everyone a vaccine who wants to have one.

The second phase will emphasise policies that seek to minimise serious illness, hospitalisation and fatality as a result of Covid-19, rather than suppressing the number of daily cases overall.

In that phase, lockdowns “should only occur in extreme circumstances to prevent escalating hospitalisation and fatality”.

[There was no argument inside national cabinet about Morrison’s AstraZeneca advice because he didn’t flag it | Katharine Murphy](#)
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Morrison appealed to anyone hesitant about getting vaccinated against Covid-19, saying he understood that some people wondered whether they were at higher risk of being run over by a car than catching the virus.

“In a sense we’re prisoners of our own success,” Morrison said. “If you get vaccinated, you get to change how we live as a country. You get to change how you live in Australia.”

As NSW [reported 31 new cases](#) of community transmission in the 24 hours to 8pm on Thursday, Berejiklian said she had expressed a view to fellow premiers and chief ministers that “just because you reduce the number of people coming in, doesn’t mean outbreaks aren’t going to happen”.

“My heart goes out to thousands of Australians who have to wait longer to come home,” she said.

Morrison went into the meeting facing [blowback from the premiers](#) on a few fronts, including the [flight arrival caps](#) and the state of the vaccination rollout, but the ACT chief minister, Andrew Barr, said there had been an “outbreak of peace and harmony”.

An outbreak of peace and harmony in the federation after a positive [#NationalCabinet](#) meeting this morning.

— Andrew Barr MLA (@ABarrMLA) [July 2, 2021](#)

As Guardian Australia has [previously reported](#), state governments have expressed confusion over Morrison’s comments on Monday evening about [access to the AstraZeneca vaccine](#) for under-40s, because the prime minister had not explicitly flagged it in the national cabinet meeting beforehand.

General practitioners [have also criticised](#) what they saw as confused and conflicting statements.

Morrison denied on Friday that he had been loose with his language on the matter. He said the Atagi advice that Pfizer is preferred for under-60s did not preclude younger Australians from having AstraZeneca if they spoke to their doctor about it.

He also said the federal government had made a decision “to extend the MBS [Medicare Benefits Schedule] item to enable doctors to talk to their patients”.

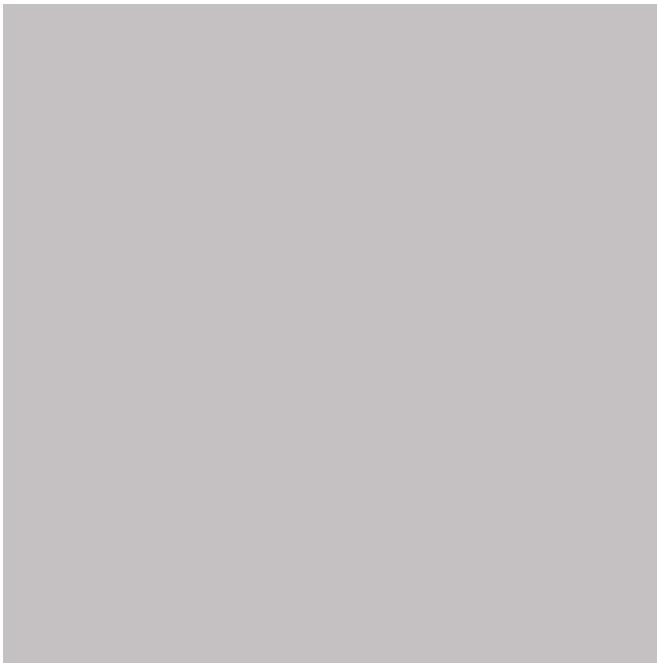
To date, the MBS items for vaccine counselling have only applied to patients aged over 50, but the health minister, Greg Hunt, flagged on Tuesday that was set to change to include under-50s.

In a statement on Friday afternoon, Hunt said the relevant MBS items were being extended to be available for all patients, regardless of age, “from 29 June”.

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[Ryanair](#)

Ryanair passenger numbers soar as Covid vaccine restores travel confidence

Airline carried 5.3m passengers on 38,000 flights in June compared with only 400,000 a year earlier

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Ryanair carried 1 million passengers in April and 1.8 million in May.
Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Ryanair carried 1 million passengers in April and 1.8 million in May.
Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Mark Sweney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Fri 2 Jul 2021 09.35 EDT

Ryanair's passenger numbers surged in June, with the easing of travel restrictions and successful rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination programme prompting a flood of holidaymakers to seek out summer sunshine in Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The no-frills airline, which in June reported the biggest annual loss in its 35-year history, carried 5.3 million passengers on 38,000 flights last month. In June 2020, Ryanair carried only 400,000 passengers.

There has been a steady increase in passengers for Europe's biggest airline in recent months – in April there were 1 million travellers and 1.8 million in May – as the easing of travel restrictions across parts of the continent fuels a gradual recovery in the hard-hit aviation industry.

Ryanair said the most popular destinations booked by holidaymakers in June were Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The green shoots of recovery are also evident in traffic figures issued by Ryanair's rival Wizz Air, which carried 1.55 million passengers last month. This is more than triple the 502,000 passengers who flew in the same month last year.

Last month, Ryanair and Manchester Airports Group, the UK's largest airport group, which also operates Stansted and East Midlands airports, [launched a legal challenge](#) calling for transparency in the government's handling of its contentious traffic light travel system for grading countries safe to visit.

Guardian business email sign-up

Ryanair and MAG argue that ministers have not been clear about how the government has made decisions regarding the categorisation of countries as red, amber or green, which is undermining consumer confidence to book summer holidays.

Earlier this year the UK's advertising watchdog [banned Ryanair's controversial "jab and go" holiday TV campaign](#), with the Advertising

Standards Authority saying it encouraged the public to act irresponsibly once they had received a coronavirus vaccination.

Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell, said the passenger number reports from Ryanair and Wizz Air boosted share prices in the sector on Friday.

“Airline stocks did their best to fly higher following encouraging numbers from the sector. Wizz Air managed to fill nearly two-thirds of its seats on aircraft in service during June, while Ryanair flew nearly three times as many people that month versus May,” Mould said.

“Under the circumstances, these are positive numbers. However, the airline business model is built on filling planes near or at capacity and then scooping up extra fees on top for everything from early boarding to storing bags.

“The sector needs a continuous flow of people through airports and ongoing Covid restrictions imposed by various governments around the world mean the industry is still some way off from operating smoothly.”

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Euro 2020

UK residents have tickets cancelled for England's Euro 2020 Rome quarter-final

- Uefa acts on request from Italian government before game
- England to face Ukraine at Rome's Stadio d'Olimpico



UK residents who wanted to attend England's Euro 2020 quarter-final in Rome will not be allowed tickets. Photograph: Kieran McManus/BPI/Shutterstock

UK residents who wanted to attend England's Euro 2020 quarter-final in Rome will not be allowed tickets. Photograph: Kieran McManus/BPI/Shutterstock

[Paul MacInnes](#)

[@PaulMac](#)

Thu 1 Jul 2021 17.21 EDT

England fans resident in the UK who had precious tickets for the [Euro 2020](#) quarter-final have seen them cancelled at the request of the Italian government.

Fears that fans would travel to Italy for the match against Ukraine on Saturday and ignore a five-day Covid quarantine period led authorities to ask Uefa to take back tickets sold to UK residents, a request with which the tournament organisers have complied.

[‘Normal’ Jack Grealish revelling in role as England fans’ favourite](#)

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Fans who had bought tickets for the match before 28 June were given a deadline of 9pm on Thursday night to transfer the tickets to friends or UK nationals living in Italy. After that their tickets were withdrawn, refunded and put back on general sale.

It comes as the latest twist in a befuddling saga as [England](#) fans have faced up to the realities of travelling abroad while levels of the Delta variant of Covid-19 are rising at home.

England have played all their matches in the tournament to this point at Wembley, and beat Germany in front of 40,000 fans in scenes of non-socially distant jubilation on Tuesday. With both semi-finals and final to be played at Wembley, plans to further increase capacity were described by Horst Seehofer, Germany's interior minister, on Thursday as "utterly irresponsible".

Rome's Stadio Olimpico will hold only 18,000 on Saturday. Under Uefa rules, the FA had a national allocation of 2,000 tickets for the match but returned it on Wednesday after deciding not to sell the tickets to UK residents because of the quarantine requirements. Now tickets bought by fans much earlier in the sales process have been returned too.

Some England fans, resident in Italy or elsewhere on the continent, may still be able to make it to the match. Plans had been set up by Uefa to give priority to fans who declared themselves expatriate England supporters when registering for tickets via general sale.

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- If you already have the Guardian app, make sure you're on the most recent version.

- In the Guardian app, tap the yellow button at the bottom right, then go to Settings (the gear icon), then Notifications.
- Turn on sport notifications.

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A Uefa spokesperson said: “The Italian authorities have asked Uefa to take measures to ensure that UK residents do not circumvent the quarantine requirements applicable when entering Italy. They have specifically asked Uefa to cancel tickets sold to UK residents as of 28 June, stopping sales and transfers as of 21:00 this evening.

“UK residents who bought their tickets as of 28 June have been given the chance to transfer their tickets to Italian residents by 21:00 or return their tickets.”

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Until recently, doctors treated all cases of endometriosis with the same approach, usually involving surgery. Illustration: Hannah Izzard/Guardian Design

[The pain that can't be seen](#)

A common treatment for endometriosis could actually be making things worse

Until recently, doctors treated all cases of endometriosis with the same approach, usually involving surgery. Illustration: Hannah Izzard/Guardian Design

Repeat surgeries for endometriosis could be exacerbating pain symptoms, experts say

by [Lucia Osborne-Crowley](#)

Fri 2 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

It has long been believed that the best way to treat endometriosis, a chronic inflammatory condition that affects one in 10 women globally, is by performing laparoscopic surgery to remove damaged tissue from the body.

But experts now say the surgery may not be as effective as once thought in relieving symptoms, and could actually be making things worse for some patients, including those who have developed separate pain conditions as a result of their endometriosis.

“We find that patients don’t always get better with surgery, and those who do often feel better for a very short time,” Andrew Horne, a professor of gynaecology and reproductive sciences at Edinburgh University’s MRC Centre for Reproductive Health, tells the Guardian.



Patients with cystic ovarian endometriosis are likely to experience significant relief from having surgery to remove the cysts. Photograph: Morsa Images/Getty Images

Broadly speaking, endometriosis is a disease where tissue that is similar to that which is normally found inside the uterine walls – called endometrial tissue – is found growing in other parts of the body. It was once considered a pelvis-only disease but it has now been found growing on every organ of the body.

Horne says endometriosis should in fact be clearly delineated into three separate strands of disease: superficial peritoneal endometriosis, cystic ovarian endometriosis (or endometrioma) and deep endometriosis.

Until recently, Horne says, doctors treated all cases of endometriosis with the same approach, usually involving surgery. But evidence now shows that the best treatment depends greatly on which of the three kinds of disease a patient has, and the type of endometrial-like tissue that is found.

[Too many women have pain during sex. This must not be a taboo subject | Susannah Thraves](#)

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The ovarian strand of the disease involves clumps of the errant tissue growing in the ovaries, which commonly forms cysts that can burst and cause severe pain and inflammation. Patients with this strand are likely to experience significant relief from the removal of these cysts, says Horne, so surgery is often a necessary part of the treatment process.

But 80% of endometriosis sufferers have superficial peritoneal disease and, in these patients, it is less likely that the errant tissue itself is causing the majority of a patient's pain and symptoms. Instead, the way that the diseased tissue interacts with nerves in the pelvis is usually the main culprit.

In these cases, surgery could actually be making things worse.

[what is endometriosis interactive diagram](#)

The nerve connection

Pain is by far the most commonly reported and most severe symptom of endometriosis. A 2021 study found that 59% of women with endometriosis report having experienced pelvic pain for more than five years. A 2020 study found that 39.9% of patients have experienced pain so severe they needed to present to an emergency department.

But like the disease itself, these sensations are all referred to under the umbrella of “pelvic pain”, despite important differences.

“There are many different mechanisms that can cause pain in endometriosis, and the different types of pain will respond to different types of treatment,” says Katy Vincent, a senior pain fellow and associate professor in Oxford University’s Nuffield Department of Women’s & Reproductive Health.

“Surgery is a very important tool in treating endometriosis – but we need to better understand when and how it should be used as part of a more personalised treatment plan.”

The kind of pain we most commonly think of – the pain associated with an injury such as a broken arm or a scalding burn – is called nociceptive pain.

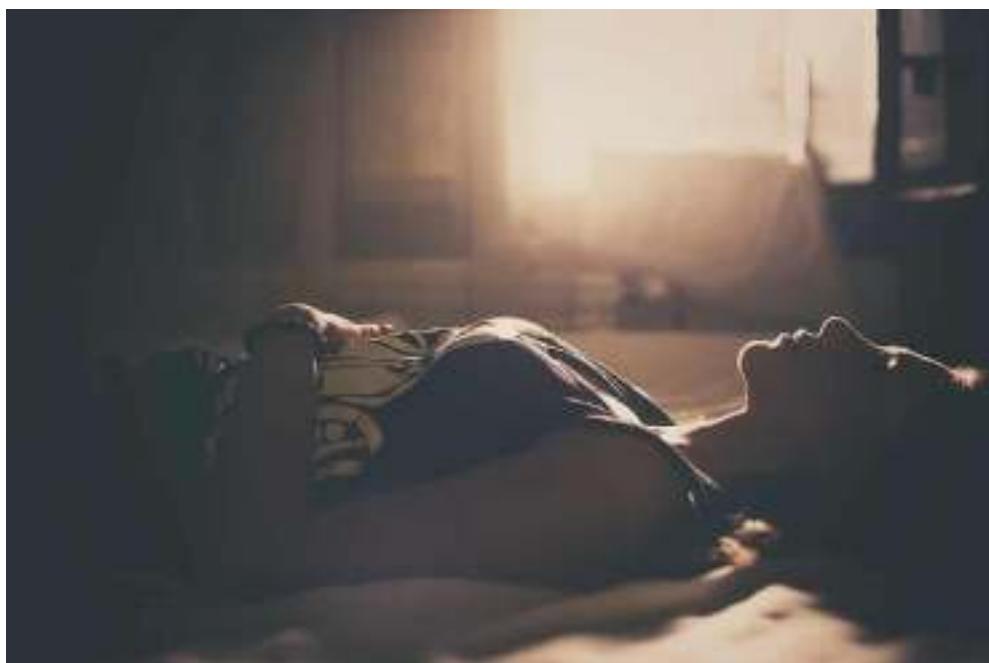
In the case of endometriosis, there will usually be some degree of this kind of pain, based on the presence of the diseased tissue.

But it's not always the primary suspect, Vincent says.

Research increasingly shows that a lot of endometriosis sufferers experience high degrees of neuropathic pain, or pain that emanates from damaged nerve endings.

The Oxford team believe there are likely to be three ways in which nerve pain can develop in endometriosis patients. The first is that the nerves surrounding the disease lesions become hypersensitive. The second is that some lesions compress the nerves physically and thus cause pain. And the third is that nerves can be damaged during endometriosis-associated surgery.

Nerves and blood cells can actually grow inside endometrial lesions, according to Dr Christian Becker, associate professor at the Nuffield Department of Women's & Reproductive Health. That means that when surgeons open up the pelvis to remove the diseased tissue, they often have to slice through some of the nerves that are bound up with the lesions or those that are close by. This severing of nerves can compound the neuropathic component and create more nerve pain.



Analgesics, nonsteroidal painkillers, hormone treatments and GnRH injections can all be used to treat endometriosis. Photograph: milos-kreckovic/Getty Images

“Patients whose symptoms are caused primarily by neuropathic pain are less likely to benefit from surgery, and could even experience more pain following surgery,” Vincent says.

Horne agrees: “In neuropathic pain cases, repeated surgeries are very unlikely to be a good thing. And in these cases, we need to figure out whether surgery is helpful at all.”

There are several licensed treatments for nerve pain, often used successfully in patients who suffer from neuropathic pain. Vincent says these drugs could be a far better course of treatment for those with severe nerve pain than surgery. But none of the drugs have yet been approved for use in endometriosis because the requisite research has not been conducted.

The vicious pain cycle

Another type of pain that endometriosis patients may be experiencing has to do with the central nervous system, says Lydia Coxon, another member of the Nuffield Department of Women’s & Reproductive Health. This occurs after the brain experiences pain without relief for an extended period, then adapts itself to send severe pain signals even if the tissue damage is not severe. The Oxford team describe this as [central pain sensitisation, or “turning the volume up on pain”](#).

All pain experiences are produced by the brain, but with endometriosis, the central nervous system will sometimes send more pain signals to the brain than usual, particularly if a patient has previously overridden pain warning signs.

The psychological condition that a patient develops from living with the illness actually make the pain worse

Katy Vincent

Vincent and Coxon made clear that this does not mean the condition is “all in a person’s head” or a consequence of depression or anxiety. That trope, which many endometriosis sufferers have heard, get the causative link the wrong way around.

“It’s never that a patient’s underlying anxiety causes or explains endometriosis,” Vincent says. “It’s that a patient who suffers from chronic, unexplained and untreated pain will often *develop* an anxiety or depression condition as a result of that pain.

“An anxious or depressed brain becomes more sensitive to the experience of pain, meaning that the psychological condition that a patient develops from living with the illness actually make the pain worse.”

Being in pain changes you, Becker says, and the anxious brain is then more likely to feel pain more acutely, and so the cycle continues.

All pain travels on a journey from the damaged tissue through the nervous system and spine to the brain before it is felt or interpreted by us. In endometriosis patients, doctors have found that things can go wrong at any stage of that process to amplify the pain, so it is important to understand which system is causing the majority of the patient’s pain.

03:08

What is chronic pain and how does it work? – video explainer

Because surgery doesn’t work on some patients due to the different types of disease and mechanisms of pain, doctors often order repeat laparoscopic surgeries in an attempt to cut out more and more endometriosis.

Not only will repeat surgery not work the second, third or seventh time if the patient’s pain is neuropathic or chronic, Horne says, but repeated surgeries also further exacerbate nerve pain and make the body more sensitive.

A revolution needed in diagnostics

Researchers have known about the three subtypes of endometriosis for the last decade but the distinction has only become widely accepted and well-

researched in the past five years.

The only way to determine which subtype a patient has is through laparoscopic surgery, Horne says. That's because while ovarian disease can show up on imaging tests such as ultrasounds, it is much less likely for either deep disease or superficial disease to appear on these screening tests.

Analysis of diagnostic laparoscopies tells us that about 80% of patients suffer from superficial endometriosis. For those patients, a nonsurgical screening process would be a much better first step to determine which treatments to use.

Horne says endometriosis experts are working on improving imaging tools such as ultrasounds and magnetic resonance imaging, or MRIs, in the hopes that in the coming years these screening tools will become more sensitive to superficial and deep endometriosis.



Endometriosis experts hope MRI scans can in the future become more sensitive to picking up superficial and deep endometriosis. Photograph: dowell/Getty Images

"We need to find ways to predict which patients are likely to respond to surgery and which patients will likely not respond to surgery at all," Horne says.

A targeted approach to screening would also allow for a more patient-specific treatment plan. That could include surgery in cases where it is likely to improve symptoms, or otherwise a combination of the other available treatments for the disease. These include analgesics, nonsteroidal painkillers such as ibuprofen, hormone treatments such as the combined contraceptive pill and GnRH injections, which chemically induce a temporary menopause in the sufferer.

[Why don't doctors trust women? Because they don't know much about us |](#)

[Gabrielle Jackson](#)

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Unfortunately, endometriosis research remains chronically underfunded, and so we don't yet have the diagnostic tools to make these distinctions, the experts say.

"Endometriosis continues to be more hidden than other diseases, partly because [it is a women's condition](#), and the funding and the research just isn't there yet," Vincent says.

Horne compares the situation to breast cancer: in the 20th century, the disease was under-researched and all patients were treated with the same blanket approach of chemotherapy and radiotherapy drugs.

But a huge public health push in awareness and funding led to a much better understanding of the condition, and now women are thoroughly screened at the time of diagnosis to determine which of a large arsenal of treatments will work best on their cancer.

Horne say the same needs to happen for endometriosis if we are to properly treat the disease and ensure we are not encouraging patients to undergo repeat surgeries that could be making their pain worse.

Sufferers of chronic pain have long been told it's all in their head. We now know that's not true. [The pain that can't be seen](#) looks at why doctors are playing catch-up on chronic pain conditions like endometriosis, migraine and more – and what they have to do with long Covid.

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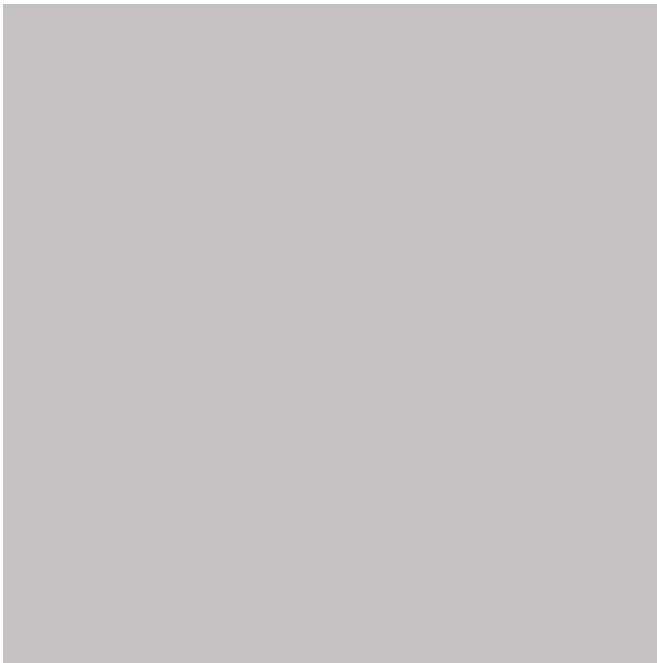
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The pain that can't be seen

This is what chronic pain looks like – in pictures

Receiving a diagnosis of a painful chronic illness felt like a slow death sentence. But I am and will be OK. Photograph: Michaela Skovranova

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[Labour](#)

Kim Leadbeater: political novice who will not toe the line in Westminster

Personable and warm, the new Labour MP is ‘as close to a “normal person” as has been elected’



Labour’s Kim Leadbeater after winning the Batley and Spen byelection.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Labour’s Kim Leadbeater after winning the Batley and Spen byelection.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Josh Halliday](#) North of England correspondent

Fri 2 Jul 2021 05.49 EDT

“I’ve got a bloody long list here, lads,” said Kim Leadbeater as she bounded away from a voter in the early days of the Batley and Spen byelection campaign.

On this occasion, parking was the issue that Leadbeater had added to her little notebook of voters’ complaints. As a local resident, she quickly grasped the issues often overlooked in the national narrative.

Leadbeater could not have foreseen, however, that the contest would soon turn from parking and potholes to Palestine, or that uniformed police would be required for protection in her home town.

Her [election](#) as MP for Batley and Spen on Friday morning followed one of the most divisive byelection campaigns for decades. There were homophobic slurs, dirty tricks, fake leaflets, violence. And in the middle of this ugly cacophony stood a newcomer to politics whose sister was murdered in this constituency just five years ago.

Leadbeater, 45, was [incredibly close](#) to her older sister, Jo Cox, whose killing convulsed Britain a week before the EU referendum in 2016. They grew up in Heckmondwike, two miles from Batley, and shared friends, interests and values that were shaped by their parents.

While Cox went to Cambridge University, Leadbeater stayed local and rose through the ranks as a super saleswoman for one of West Yorkshire’s many bed companies. She went on to work as a wellbeing coach and personal trainer, and as an ambassador for the Jo Cox Foundation, set up in her sister’s memory.

Her decision to put herself forward for MP took many by surprise. “She has never seemed particularly political, neither [Labour](#) nor Tory,” said one local [Labour](#) figure.

Labour flexed its usual rules of having to be a member for at least 12 months to allow her to stand. “The most difficult decision I’ve ever had to make,” she said after deliberating with her mum, dad and partner. Security, understandably, was a prime concern.

When Labour activists were kicked, punched and pelted with eggs days before polling day, Leadbeater visited her parents – Jean, a former school secretary, and Gordon, who worked in a toothpaste and hairspray factory – to reassure them.

“She was very steely about it,” said one close family friend. “She was understandably quite shaken but she’s been hardened by what’s happened to her and her family and she genuinely just felt for the community.”

In fact, the mood in Leadbeater’s camp improved following the scuffles. Her team say they were inundated with messages of support from Muslim residents, particularly women, saying “that doesn’t reflect us”.

Leadbeater is a high-energy extrovert, personable and warm, and “as a close to a ‘normal person’ as has been elected,” said one Labour activist. She greets strangers with a cheery “hello, love!” and practically bounced between doors on the campaign trail, often bumping into old school friends with whom she would chat for an age.

“Kim being the way she is, she would stand and talk to them for half an hour – about yoga or anything – while the rest of us were trying to get her to come and knock on doors,” said a close friend. “She’s totally, totally, totally a people person.”

[Leadbeater’s slim byelection win offers sweet relief for Starmer](#)

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Most new MPs have at least one or two unsuccessful election campaigns behind them. Some have stood as a councillor. Most have been actively involved in their constituency parties. Leadbeater has none of this experience, but believes that could help her when she travels 200 miles south to Westminster.

“There’s two reasons I’ve said before I wouldn’t get involved in politics,” she told the Guardian on a break between door-knocking. “One was because I swear too much. The second was because I’m not very good at toeing the party line. I will be my own woman.”

Leadbeater has been outspoken about how all political parties have lost touch with voters. Will she be muzzled now she has joined the fray? “Will I ’eck,” she said.

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10 of the best ...Music

From boyband member to turkey farmer: 10 of the best pop star career changes



Crowning glory ... former JLS member JB Gill now owns a 15-acre turkey farm. Photograph: WTM/L/PA

Crowning glory ... former JLS member JB Gill now owns a 15-acre turkey farm. Photograph: WTM/L/PA

Lauren Laverne, Isaac Hayes, and the other music stars who had equally unexpected second winds

- [Modern Toss on musos switching jobs](#)

[Martin Horsfield](#)

Fri 2 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

Lauren Laverne

Kenickie frontperson turned radio presenter

With [Cerys Matthews](#) and [Guy Garvey](#) ensconced at BBC 6 Music, you might see the “indie star turns DJ” career path as fairly routine. But Laverne blazed a trail on leaving punk teens Kenickie for Xfm. That the presenter of Desert Island Discs once roared “She threw up and I was glad” in ripe mackem tones suggests the voice of the nation is changing for the better.

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

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Dan Spitz

Anthrax guitarist turned master watchmaker

Spitz’s shredding is all over the big-shorted thrashers’ Persistence of Time LP. Were the clues always there? Having completed two degrees, he is now one of the world’s top horologists. And definitely the most metal. “When it comes to a watch’s quality, the truth is that the movement sucks ass or the movement kicks ass,” he advises.



Stand and deliver Erykah Badu. Photograph: Alamy

Erykah Badu

Neo-soul pioneer turned doula

More of a sideline than a new career (she is also threatening a lifestyle store with scents including Badu's Pussy, made from her burnt pants), in 2011 Badu qualified as a doula. Working among friends – and under the name Badoula, naturally – she has since delivered more than 40 young 'uns. To set the scene, they "like Wu-Tang", apparently.

JB Gill

JLS singer turned turkey farmer

We are used to former X Factor stars moving into musical theatre or light entertainment, but the outdoors-loving Gill was having none of that. After JLS split, he expanded his Kent smallholding into a 15-acre turkey farm. If you happened to ever wonder where Little Mix and Zayn Malik buy their birds for Christmas, wonder no more.

Niall O'Flaherty

Sultans of Ping FC singer turned university lecturer

Many alt-rockers go back to college. But who, really, on hearing 1992's nutty student-pleaser Where's Me Jumper?, could have predicted that the Sultans of Ping shouter would have an impressive second act as a [lecturer in the history of European political thought at King's College London?](#)



Saucy ... Isaac Hayes. Photograph: Anthony Barboza/Getty

Isaac Hayes

Soul-funk crooner turned barbecue expert

Hayes had done it all by 1971, and when *South Park* gave him a surprise late-career voice turn as Chef, you could be forgiven for thinking they were simply riffing on his loverman persona. In fact, by then he had a barbecue restaurant and his own Memphis Magic range of sauces.

Richard Coles

Communards keyboardist turned vicar

Previously a purveyor of political disco-pop, the now [Rev Richard Coles](#) was surprised on joining theological college to find an ex-member of Roxy Music and someone who wrote songs for Sinitta had beaten him to it. Still, he remains the UK media's go-to rocking vicar.

Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter

Jazz-rock guitarist turned US military consultant

While one wouldn't want to deny anyone a living, it must be a disappointment to Baxter's old comrades in Steely Dan that he now deploys his signature precision for the Man. His expertise in defence software stems from his research into digital recording. Be warned, Russia: Baxter's also threatened to "reach out" to fellow boffin Brian May.



Sofa so good ... Alannah Currie with the Thompson Twins, 1984.
Photograph: Mike Prior/Redferns

Alannah Currie

Thompson Twins percussionist turned arthouse upholsterer

"You stitch me up, oh-oh!" In the exact opposite of Jack White's career trajectory, this icy 80s xylophone basher and big hat enthusiast went from pop star to cushion stuffer. In truth, her work is more Damien Hirst than Dunelm. A chaise longue exhibited by Currie in 2011 came with a stuffed swan for an armrest.

The drummer from Shed Seven

Shed Seven drummer turned quiz software developer

“Alan Shed” has gone from pub quiz question (what was his real name?) to the man who sets the questions – via a team of 16 employees. Initially made for linking up pub quizzes, Gala Bingo-style, his SpeedQuizzing app was recently used by schools worldwide for remote teaching.

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[OpinionLabour](#)

Starmer has a little breathing space after Batley and Spen. He must use it wisely

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The byelection victory is a relief, but Labour's bedrock is breaking across northern England and the Midlands



Keir Starmer and Kim Leadbeater during a visit to the Jo Cox Community Wood before the Batley and Spen byelection. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Keir Starmer and Kim Leadbeater during a visit to the Jo Cox Community Wood before the Batley and Spen byelection. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Fri 2 Jul 2021 05.38 EDT

If part of the art of politics is expectation management, then Keir Starmer can consider himself an artist. Few in his own party or outside it [expected the result](#) that came close to dawn on Friday morning. On the contrary, Starmer's internal opponents and would-be rivals took it as read that Labour would lose in Batley and Spen. On Thursday, allies of Angela Rayner were said to be preparing a leadership challenge, only weakly denied [by the deputy leader herself](#). They will have to shelve those plans, at least for now.

That will bring relief for Starmer. A leader chosen chiefly for his presumed electability would have been imperilled by losing a second long-held [Labour](#) seat in as many months, with the sting of byelection defeat in Hartlepool still so fresh. But he is not the only one who should feel relieved.

Had the Tories won, it would have prompted a grim conclusion about the current state of our politics, suggesting that the Conservative party has developed a kind of herd impunity, one that allows them to get away with any and every thing. For them to have gained a seat off the opposition – less than a week after the health secretary was exposed as a florid hypocrite, violating the very rules he had pressed upon everyone else, and a matter of days after the prime minister was re-confirmed as a liar, [falsely claiming](#) to have fired that minister when in fact he had shrugged off his misconduct – would have meant that the Conservatives were now fully inoculated against accountability.

[Batley and Spen by-election live: Tory party co-chair suggests Hancock's conduct helped Labour hold seat](#)

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Still, they did come alarmingly close, falling short by a mere 323 votes. Batley and Spen saw a 2.9% swing away from Labour and towards the Conservatives, the largest swing to a governing party for 39 years, barring that win in Hartlepool and the Tory victory in Copeland under Starmer's predecessor in 2017. The Conservatives are gaining rather than losing support after 11 years in power, and following a pandemic in which, as Johnson himself all but [admitted in a message to Dominic Cummings](#), the UK had achieved the twin distinction of "being the European country with the most fatalities and the biggest economic hit". That makes it an open question whether the prime minister will conclude from this, and from last month's [loss of Chesham and Amersham](#), that there are limits to the Conservatives' current dominance – that the shameless behaviour of himself and his government exacts an electoral price and therefore needs to change. Or whether he will put both defeats down to by-election quirks and conclude that, overall, and thanks to public admiration for the mass vaccination programme, he is double-jabbed against the consequences of his own actions.

There's a second ground for relief, though that too is qualified. Batley and Spen declined to do as it was asked by that singularly poisonous force in British life, George Galloway. I spoke to a veteran of some of the most brutal political battles of recent history, whose memory stretches back to the notorious Bermondsey [by-election of 1983](#), and he was insistent that, having

spent weeks on the ground there, Batley and Spen was the most vicious he had ever seen. Fake leaflets of unknown origin, harassment of Labour canvassers, the abuse of the Labour candidate, Kim Leadbeater, in the streets – and all in the place where her sister, Jo Cox, had been murdered five years earlier. This was a [truly grim campaign](#).

The echo of Bermondsey is loud because homophobia was a feature in this battle as it was in that one. Leadbeater was the victim of WhatsApp whispers suggesting her sexuality made her unfit to be elected. Meanwhile, Galloway tweeted that he was “[a straight white male with six children](#)”. There were similar doorstep murmurings [about Starmer](#), supposedly in thrall to the shadowy “Zionists” and with a Jewish wife to boot. Of course, Galloway says he abhors [antisemitism](#), which makes it rotten luck that [one of his aides was exposed](#) as a Holocaust denier. Hard to imagine what might have drawn such a person to an avowed anti-racist, but there we are.

When the Galloway travelling circus comes to town, it always brings the same trouble, pitting communities against each other, stirring up fear and loathing. But this time he did it in a seat that knew the lethal cost of political hatred. It’s a mystery why some still treat him as part of the left, granting him leeway as a fellow progressive. He [voted Tory](#) in May’s Scottish elections and [backed Nigel Farage’s Brexit party](#) in 2019.

[Labour’s Kim Leadbeater wins narrow victory in Batley and Spen byelection](#)

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Galloway wanted to drain away enough Labour votes to push the party into third place and drive Starmer out. He was explicit about that goal and he failed. Indeed, it’s likely that his stance for Brexit and against “wokery” may have pulled in some ex-Labour votes who would otherwise have nudged the Tories across the line. Labour canvassers were glad to meet Tory switchers, particularly in parts of the Spen valley, who told them they were backing Leadbeater partly because they knew and liked her – she was the only major candidate who was local – and partly out of revulsion at the Galloway campaign.

Even so, Starmer can allow himself no more than a few moments to exhale this weekend. He came within a whisker of losing what was once a safe Labour seat. That goes beyond the specific dynamics of one Yorkshire constituency; beyond his clear limitations as a leader; beyond even a pandemic that has deprived Starmer not only of the chance to make his case but also, as one Labour bigwig points out, of learning from live audiences what lands and what flops.

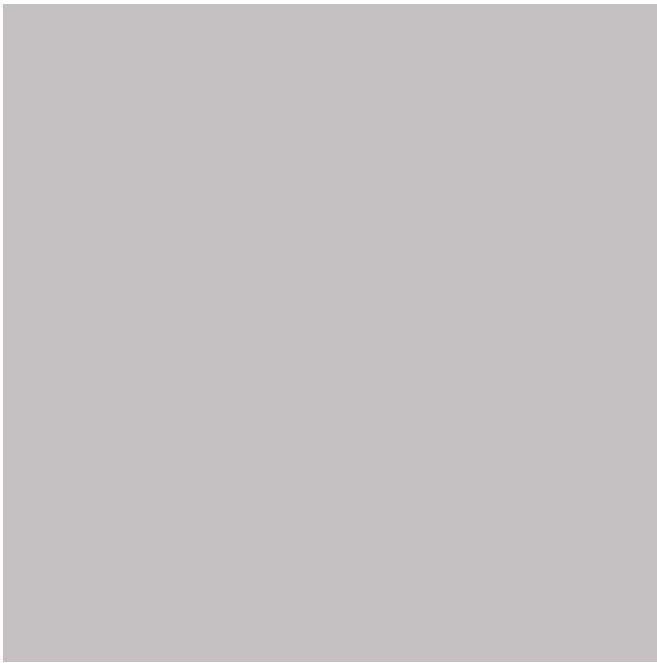
No, the problem is structural and the closeness of this by-election illustrates it. Simply put, Labour's coalition is breaking. Labour lost its bedrock in Scotland, and now too many of its seats in northern England and the Midlands have gone, or are going, the same way.

There are steps Starmer has to take – and he should take them with as much urgency as if he had lost. He has to clarify who he is, what he stands for and what he stands against, even if that means a row with his party: there is no value in unity when it's the unity of the grave. He has to develop one or two core themes and repeat them so often that even uttering the words makes him and his (currently anonymous) shadow cabinet nauseous – for only then will the message begin to reach the public.

The most fertile territory is that currently [staked out by Joe Biden](#): jobs. Starmer can expose the gap between Tory rhetoric on “levelling up” and the reality. He can insist that when it comes to jobs, only Labour is the real deal.

All that is necessary, but there is no guarantee it will be sufficient. Starmer is up against a government granted rare licence by the electorate, while Labour is barely granted a hearing. He has won himself no more than a brief breathing space. He must use it.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist



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The more we see older women succeed, the more they will succeed

Gaby Hinsliff



Anne Robinson's new job might not seem relevant to the average working woman, but visibility is vital to defeat ageism



Anne Robinson, with Rachel Riley and Susie Dent, is the new host of Channel 4's Countdown. Photograph: Rachel Joseph/Channel 4/PA

Anne Robinson, with Rachel Riley and Susie Dent, is the new host of Channel 4's Countdown. Photograph: Rachel Joseph/Channel 4/PA

Fri 2 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Anne Robinson is, as she says herself, the oldest woman on television not judging cakes.

But age has hardly mellowed her. Like the canny pro she is, the 76-year-old former Queen of Mean toned it down a bit for her somewhat unlikely new gig hosting the gentle teatime TV quiz show [Countdown](#), but the [pre-launch interviews](#) were as sharp and punchy as ever. After this long in the business, she knows her shtick. And love it or loathe it, there is something rather thrilling about her determination not to be put out to grass.

This month, the US business magazine Forbes released its inaugural "[50 over 50](#)" power list of women making professional breakthroughs in later life, from the powerhouse Netflix producer Shonda Rhimes to veteran diplomat Madeleine Albright. It sparked such interest that it's now planning more, sensing a market for something celebrating older women's energy and creativity, instead of yet another faintly exhausting list of power brokers

under 30. It's not hard to conjure up some British equivalents. Dame [Sarah Gilbert](#), the 58-year-old scientist behind the AstraZeneca jab, is an obvious candidate but so is the vaccine taskforce chair [Kate Bingham](#), 55, whose knack for picking winners reflects decades of investment experience.

Older women's nous seems, for once, to be in demand in politics too. When the pollster Deborah Mattinson joins a beleaguered Keir Starmer's office she'll bring not just extensive research from the so-called "red wall" seats where Labour is being pulverised, but the institutional memory of someone who has known the party inside out since the 1980s, worked with Labour prime ministers, and is acutely aware that female voters over 50 (among whom Labour does badly) help swing elections. Given half a chance, she'll help Starmer understand this often ignored group. In Downing Street, 53-year-old Simone Finn, who has been in Conservative politics since the noughties, wields increasing influence. But how does any of this help ordinary middle-aged working women, battling that toxic combination of ageism and sexism that has yet to find a catchy name, under the shadow of a pandemic?

Pre-Covid, women were driving employment among the over-50s to record highs; by 2019, older female employment rates were up 15% from the millennium. But Covid hit this group hard. A [Resolution Foundation](#) analysis found lockdown had dented older women's employment rates harder than any other major crisis since the 1980s, with Black women in particular struggling. The end of the [furlough scheme](#) this month will be a perilous time for older workers who fear being pushed into premature retirement. Yet with a bit of help from government, these don't have to be older women's doom years.

Female employment bounced back unexpectedly strongly this spring; older women are disproportionately likely to work in health, social care and education, jobs largely sheltered from the pandemic (and Brexit) storms. Mothers' working hours have fallen, after months of grappling with home schooling, but by January the average woman without children at home – disproportionately likely to be either under 30 or over 50 – was [working more](#) hours than pre-Covid.

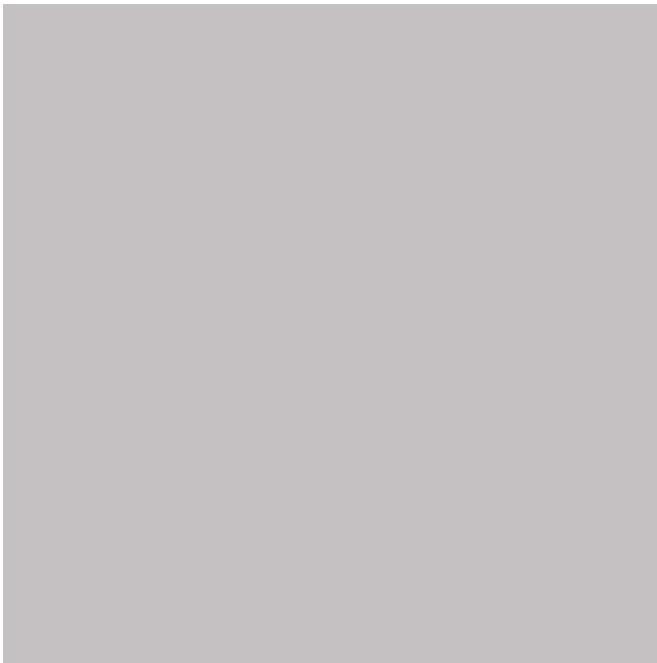
Some may be trying to compensate for a partner not earning, a phenomenon also seen after the banking crash when women's work kept many households afloat. A surge of older female breadwinners would be little cause for rejoicing, if it merely masked a crisis for older men. But it may also reflect something about the women now entering middle age, raised and educated with higher expectations than their mothers. Many Generation X women have fought to hold on to their jobs while bringing up children and they can't afford to let go now.

All the supercharged role models in the world obviously won't help without hard policy. That means a properly funded plan for social care, to stop women being forced out of work by caring for elderly parents; more flexible working towards the end of working life; specific programmes helping unemployed over-50s back into work; and better healthcare through the menopause, something the public health minister Nadine Dorries's [review on women's health](#) is examining.

But where the Robinsons and Albrights and Binghams come into their own is as a visible counterweight to the gendered ageism that so often sees older women written off prematurely. As the saying goes, you have to see it to be it, and too many women glancing around their industries see a puzzling vacuum where the powerful over-55s should be. Any glimpse of an older woman in her professional prime represents a flicker of hope.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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Replacing isolation with unreliable Covid tests will put pupils in England at risk

[Deepti Gurdasani](#)

It's not a binary choice of ending absences or disrupting education – ministers could bring in masks, air filters and more



Social-distancing signs at a secondary school in Manchester. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

Social-distancing signs at a secondary school in Manchester. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

Fri 2 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

On 4 May, many scientists, union representatives and parents, including myself, wrote an [open letter](#) to the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, warning against removal of mask requirements in English secondary schools from 17 May. We cautioned that this could lead to outbreaks in schools

driven by new variants and significant educational disruption. The warnings were ignored.

Schools are now facing very high rates of transmission, with [375,000 children](#) in England missing school for Covid-19-related reasons.

Not only has the Delta variant rapidly spread through schools, and back into the community— helping this highly transmissible variant become dominant – it has also given rise to the third wave of the pandemic, with [rapid growth in cases](#) and an increase in hospitalisations. Rather than “follow the data”, as the government claims it has done, it tried to [suppress](#) the data on early spread of the variant in schools, despite threats of [legal action](#).

Now it has decided to solve the problem by fixing the numbers of children isolating, without dealing with the root cause. If the problem isn’t visible, it doesn’t exist.

How so? Ministers are looking into doing away with the need for student contacts of positive cases to isolate, [replacing it with daily tests](#) that return results in 30 minutes. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has made clear that Orient Gene tests that were used in school trials have not been authorised for “[daily testing of contacts](#)”. Similar tests, such as Innova, have recently been [withdrawn by the FDA](#) in the US with warnings that using these could “further spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus” because of the risk of false results. The MHRA has also [warned against](#) using such tests as “green lights” – where negative tests would permit certain activities.

It is telling the government’s intention to scrap bubbles [was announced](#) while ministers were still looking at the findings of a trial – a [flawed and unethical](#) one – of tests being used in schools.

What we see now is a false dichotomy between doing away with isolation, thus exposing more children to the virus, or facing mass educational disruption. It’s as if the problem is students isolating, rather than the virus itself. The government (and much of media) has narrowed the discussion to these two options: parents must choose between having their children educated, or accepting them getting infected.

If children aren't at high risk, some say, why not simply let them get infected? Vaccination has not been offered to adolescents in the UK despite [about 6 million under-18s](#) having been vaccinated in the US, and young people being vaccinated in many other countries. Moreover, it is still the case that children, families and communities are massively impacted by infection. Office for National Statistics figures show that between 7% and 8% of children have persistent symptoms of long Covid, lasting 12 weeks or more. There are currently an estimated [33,000 children](#) with long Covid in the UK, with 7,000 who have had symptoms lasting for over one year.

The long-term consequences of this virus in children are not known, but early signs are worrying. Links with new-onset [Type 1 diabetes in children](#) are being examined. Many children with long Covid have lasting cognitive symptoms such as brain fog, difficulty with concentration and memory. While the impact of this in the brain has not been studied in children, the virus has been shown to invade the brain in adults, and is associated with significant [thinning of brain matter](#) in key areas, even among those with mild infection. Similar research has not been done in children, but we know that children exhibit similar symptoms to adults with long Covid. We also know that parents of children in schools are at higher risk of [infection and hospitalisation](#) compared with their counterparts.

[Ministers set to end automatic isolation for pupils in England](#)

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So what is the solution? It's clear that educational disruption is bad for families and children. Why not deal with the root cause of the problem, as many other authorities have done, by controlling transmission? Israel has [re-introduced masks](#) in schools after recent outbreaks, despite their higher levels of vaccination. New York is investing in air filtration devices in classrooms, which have [shown to be effective](#) in containing spread. Adolescents should be vaccinated. [Multilayered mitigations](#) can substantially reduce risk of transmission in schools, and back into households.

Our children and parents have been completely failed by government during this crisis. Parents have been forced to send children, who have not been given the option of vaccine protection, to unsafe classrooms where they

share air with other infected children, based on misplaced government faith in unreliable tests, fully knowing this could leave their children with a chronic debilitating illness. That our political leaders are willing to expose children to mass infection from a novel virus that we don't understand the long-term consequences of is gravely concerning.

- Dr Deepti Gurdasani is a clinical epidemiologist and senior lecturer in machine learning at Queen Mary University of London
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[First Dog on the Moon](#)



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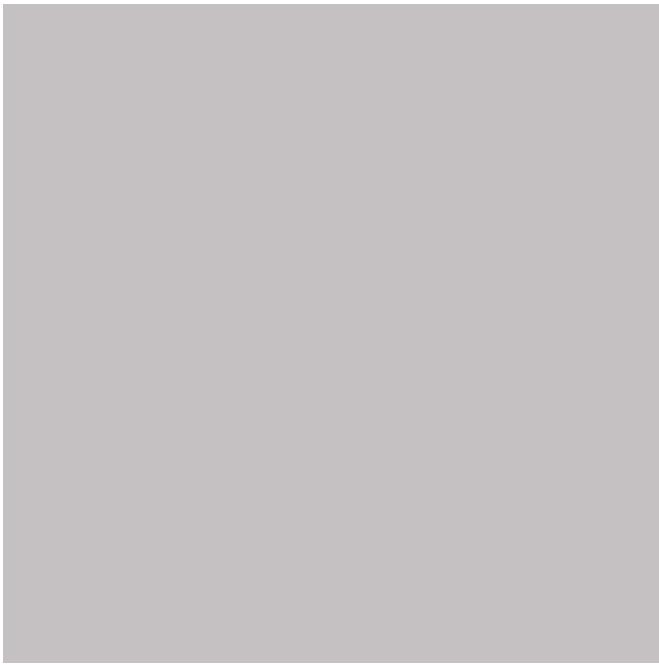
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[Sri Lanka](#)

Hundreds of dead turtles wash ashore in Sri Lanka after cargo ship wreck

Environmental experts say the case is the country's worst man-made environmental disaster



A man pulls a dead sea turtle that was washed ashore on a beach weeks after the MV X-Press Pearl container ship caught fire and sank off the coast of Colombo, in Mount Lavinia, Sri Lanka 24 June 2021. Photograph: Dinuka Liyanawatte/Reuters

A man pulls a dead sea turtle that was washed ashore on a beach weeks after the MV X-Press Pearl container ship caught fire and sank off the coast of Colombo, in Mount Lavinia, Sri Lanka 24 June 2021. Photograph: Dinuka Liyanawatte/Reuters

Reuters

Thu 1 Jul 2021 20.45 EDT

Hundreds of turtles have washed ashore after a ship caught fire and sank off the west coast of [Sri Lanka](#) in June in the country's worst-ever marine

disaster, a court in the capital Colombo has heard.

A fire erupted on the Singapore-registered MV X-Press Pearl on 20 May, carrying 1,486 containers, including 25 tonnes of nitric acid along with other chemicals and cosmetics. It sank on 2 June as a salvage crew tried to tow the vessel away from the coast.

The Russian captain of the ship appeared in court on Thursday but has yet to be charged in a case environmental experts say is Sri Lanka's worst man-made environmental disaster.

The toxins released from the ship have killed 176 turtles, 20 dolphins and four whales, deputy solicitor general, Madawa Tennakoon, said at an initial court hearing on Wednesday.



Wildlife officials carry away the carcass of a turtle that was washed ashore at the beach of Angulana, south of Sri Lanka's capital Colombo on 24 June 2021. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

A video by a local television station seen by Reuters showed carcasses of dead sea turtles and countless plastic pellets scattered over the shore with several volunteers working to clear them.

“There were more than 190 items of cargo (on the ship) and most of it was plastic-based,” environment minister Mahinda Amaraweera told reporters.

“During the south-western monsoon season, sea creatures never die in this way. Most of these carcasses are found on the west coast directly affected by the shipwreck.”

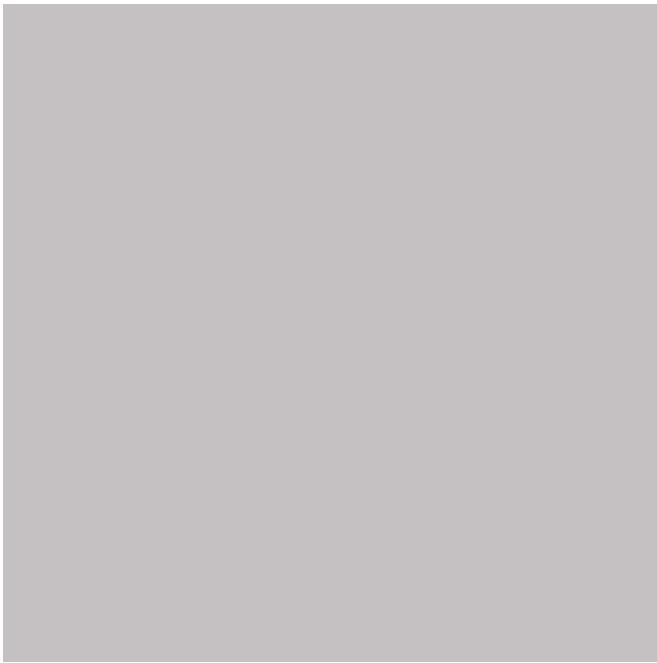
[Sri Lanka’s worst ever maritime disaster reveals the true cost of our identity crisis | Sandali Handagama](#)

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The government has named 15 people – including the captain, Tyutkalo Vitaly – as co-accused in cases over the damage caused. Vitaly made no comment when leaving the court on Thursday after the procedural hearing and could not be reached for further comment. He has been barred from leaving the country.

Authorities said last week they had lifted a ban on fishing in parts of the affected coast, though experts say risks to marine life from the disaster remain.

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Global development

Major aid donors found to have funded ‘conversion therapy’ clinics in Africa

Investigation finds UK Aid and USAid money linked to centres where ‘condemned’ practice is routinely offered to LGBTQ+ people



A sticker calling for equal rights, Nairobi, Kenya. Colonial-era laws criminalise gay sex in the country. Photograph: Simon Maina/AFP/Getty Images

A sticker calling for equal rights, Nairobi, Kenya. Colonial-era laws criminalise gay sex in the country. Photograph: Simon Maina/AFP/Getty Images

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Fri 2 Jul 2021 05.44 EDT

The UK government is among major aid donors to have funded clinics in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania that offer so-called “conversion therapies”, which pressurise gay people to “quit” same-sex attraction, an [investigation](#) has found.

In a six-month undercover investigation of the centres, reporters from global news website openDemocracy were told being gay is “evil”, “for whites” and a mental health problem. Among them were facilities linked to some of the world’s biggest aid donors, including USAid and the British government’s fund, UK [Aid](#), run by organisations such as UK-based MSI Reproductive Choices (formerly Marie Stopes International) and Swiss-based Global Fund.

Yvee Oduor from the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of [Kenya](#) called for aid donors to redirect their funding, adding that “we already have clinics and health centres run by LGBTQI+ people all over the country. Why not fund these community initiatives?”

[Conversion therapy](#) refers to physical treatment or psychotherapy which aims to change or suppress a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. It has been condemned by [more than 60 associations](#) of doctors, psychologists and counsellors worldwide.

The British government pledged to introduce a ban on conversion therapy in 2018, but in [May announced](#) that a public consultation will be held before any measures are taken. [Amnesty International](#) this week urged the government to urgently introduce a "blanket ban" on conversion therapy, fearing a consultation could lead to opt-outs for religious groups.

The openDemocracy reporters said they visited facilities that had been flagged in previous research with more than 50 LGBTQ+ people in east [Africa](#). Conversion therapy activities were found in 12 out of the 15 clinics they visited. Counselling was the most common method of conversion therapy offered, and in Uganda a reporter posing as an older sister to a 17-year-old was told to get him sleeping pills to prevent him from masturbating.

"Although we followed up on medical related leads, many interviewees shared experiences of conversion therapy practices in family, religious and workplace settings," said reporter Khatondi Soita Wepukhulu.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said it does not specifically fund the programme run by MSI Reproductive Choices referred to in the openDemocracy report, adding that it "conducts rigorous assessments before supporting any organisations" and that the UK government "strongly opposes the abhorrent practice of conversion therapy and is committed to introducing a UK ban". MSI Reproductive Choices said it has launched an investigation into the allegations, and "strongly condemns this harmful, unethical practice, which goes against everything we stand for as an organisation".

Javan Ariana, 23, a transgender sex worker, told of her experience of going to a government hospital in [Uganda](#). "I registered my preferred names and one of them asked me if I'm a man or a woman. I explained that I was born male but that I feel female. They counselled me immediately, prayed for me and told me that what I was doing was bad," said Ariana, who was told she was "evil" and was "going to die young".

“One nurse said that I couldn’t get treatment in the hospital because the government says we cannot treat such people, yet I know the law says I have the right to health,” said Ariana, who was told to bring “other people like her” to the hospital so they could be “healed” too.

“After hearing such conversations I was traumatised and scared, thinking that they might even give me the wrong medication and maybe I would end up dying. I didn’t even get the medication I needed – I just went home and stayed with my sickness.”

Under laws from colonial times, gay sex is punishable by [life imprisonment](#) in Uganda. The Sexual Offences Bill 2019, which is awaiting [presidential assent](#), reduces the sentence to 10 years – but has broadened the criminalisation of homosexuality to include the criminalisation of women who have sex with women.



Members of the LGBT+ community, including Jayne Ozanne and Peter Tatchell, lead an anti conversion therapy demonstration outside the cabinet office in London, 23 June. Photograph: Elliott Franks

In a [statement](#) in May, Human Rights Watch Africa director Mausi Segun called on President Museveni to reject the bill, which she argues “does not

do enough for survivors, conflates consensual sexual acts with violence, and offers tools to persecute LGBT people and sex workers in Uganda”.

[Uganda passes bill criminalising same-sex relationships and sex work](#)

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The investigation found an HIV clinic at a Kampala public hospital – specifically catering to marginalised groups, including LGBTQ+ people – was implicated. The clinic is run by Ugandan organisation Most At Risk Populations Initiative (Marpi), which won a \$420,000 (£305,000) USAid grant in 2019, and gets funding from the Global Fund. USAid did not respond to the Guardian’s request for comment. The Global Fund said it had “zero tolerance for any action that limits access to health services or that may encourage or promote any form of discrimination or violence”.

Tevin, 21, was taken for therapy at another Kampala hospital by her father when she was 18. The psychiatrist asked Tevin how gay she felt on a scale of one to 10. “I told her 10, why would I feel any less? I’ve been gay all my life,” Tevin said. “She told my dad if he paid I could have surgery for my brain that would make me straight, but that I had to finish high school first.” She said she was willing to go through with it if it would make her straight – and make her parents happy. Tevin believes that the psychiatrist may just have been trying to extort money from her family, but the effect was that she felt “sick and damaged, like I needed to be treated”.

“If you’re a person that has self denial it will give you false hope that you can be what you’re not. It also takes away the chance of parents accepting us for who we are, because they think they can just pay money to make us straight.

“It just makes life a whole lot harder for us.”

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[Capital punishment](#)

US halts all federal executions amid review of capital punishment

Attorney general orders temporary pause following historic use of death penalty under Trump administration



The attorney general, Merrick Garland, said that that all in the US justice system must be treated ‘fairly and humanely’. Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

The attorney general, Merrick Garland, said that that all in the US justice system must be treated ‘fairly and humanely’. Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

[Maanvi Singh](#) and agencies

@maanvissingh

Thu 1 Jul 2021 21.16 EDT

The US attorney general has imposed a moratorium on all federal executions while the justice department reviews its policies and procedures on capital

punishment. Civil rights and criminal justice advocates have been pushing for a halt following a wave of controversial executions under the [Trump administration](#).

Citing the disproportionate impact of capital punishment on people of color, and deep controversy over the drugs used to put people to death, the attorney general, Merrick Garland, ordered a temporary pause on scheduling executions.

“The Department of Justice must ensure that everyone in the federal criminal justice system is not only afforded the rights guaranteed by the constitution and laws of the United States, but is also treated fairly and humanely,” Garland said. “That obligation has special force in capital cases.”

Garland said the department would review the execution protocols put in place by the former attorney general, William Barr. A federal lawsuit was filed over the protocols – including the risk of pain and suffering associated with the use of pentobarbital, the drug used for lethal injection.

[South Carolina court blocks executions, saying inmates must have choice of firing squad](#)

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Donald Trump’s justice department resumed federal executions in July, after a 17-year hiatus. No president in more than 120 years had overseen as many federal executions. The last inmate to be executed, Dustin Higgs, was [put to death](#) at the federal prison complex in Terre Haute, Indiana, less than a week before Trump left office.

In a dissenting opinion on Higgs’s case, the supreme court justice Sonia Sotomayor excoriated the administration for carrying out the execution, condemning what she saw as “an unprecedeted rush” to kill inmates.

Secrecy surrounded all aspects of the executions. Courts relied on those carrying them out to volunteer information about glitches. None of the executioners mentioned any.

Lawyers argued that one of the men put to death last year, [Wesley Purkey](#), suffered “extreme pain” as he received a dose of pentobarbital. Purkey was the second inmate put to death. The court papers were filed by another inmate, Keith Nelson, in an effort to halt or delay his execution. But it went forward.

The federal Bureau of Prisons has declined to explain how it obtained pentobarbital for the lethal injections under Trump. But states have resorted to other means as the drugs used in lethal injections have become increasingly hard to procure.

Pharmaceutical companies in the 2000s began banning the use of their products for executions, saying they were meant to save lives, not take them.

Joe Biden has said he opposes the death penalty and his team vowed that he would take action to stop its use. Civil rights and advocacy organizations had called on the [Biden administration](#) to halt federal executions from the moment he took office. In February, 82 organizations, including the ACLU, wrote to Biden: “As youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman proclaimed on your inaugural stage: ‘If we merge mercy with might and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children’s birthright.’

“By taking immediate action to commute the sentences of the 49 individuals on federal death row, you have the ability to show that the Biden-Harris administration will govern with mercy,” the organizations said in an open letter.

But the issue is an uncomfortable one for Biden. As a then-proponent of the death penalty, he helped craft 1994 laws that added 60 federal crimes for which someone could be put to death, including kidnappings during which someone dies. He later conceded the laws disproportionately affected Black people.

“A moratorium on federal executions is one step in the right direction, but it is not enough,” said Ruth Friedman, the director of the Federal Capital Habeas Project. “We know the federal death penalty system is marred by racial bias, arbitrariness, overreaching, and grievous mistakes by defense lawyers and prosecutors that make it broken beyond repair.”

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[Virgin Galactic](#)

Richard Branson aims to beat Jeff Bezos into space by nine days

Virgin Galactic founder has announced he will take off on board the next test flight on 11 July



Richard Branson plans to travel to space as early as 11 July on board a Virgin Galactic spacecraft. Photograph: Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images

Richard Branson plans to travel to space as early as 11 July on board a Virgin Galactic spacecraft. Photograph: Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images

[Mark Sweney](#) and agencies

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Fri 2 Jul 2021 08.07 EDT

Richard Branson is aiming to beat fellow billionaire Jeff Bezos into space by nine days.

Branson's Virgin Galactic company announced on Thursday that its next test

flight would take place on 11 July and that its founder would be among the six people on board. All other passengers will be company employees. It will be only the fourth trip to space for Virgin Galactic.

The winged rocket ship – the first carrying a full crew – will launch from New Mexico after the US Federal Aviation Administration in late June [gave Virgin Galactic permission to take paying customers](#) into space after a successful test flight in May.

The news came just hours after Bezos's Blue Origin said the Amazon founder would be accompanied into space on 20 July by Wally Funk, [a female aerospace pioneer](#). The 82-year-old, who was denied the chance to be an astronaut in the 1960s due to her gender, will be the oldest person ever to travel to space.

Bezos, who is [stepping down as chief executive of Amazon on 5 July](#), is to blast off from west Texas on the 52nd anniversary of the [Apollo 11 moon landing](#).

Amazon has not commented on speculation that its 57-year-old founder may have been asked to step back from his chief executive role to become executive chairman of the company, which has a market value of \$1.7tn, before heading to space. He is being replaced by Andy Jassy, the head of its successful cloud computing division, [Amazon](#) Web Services, who formally takes over as CEO on Monday.

Bezos will be on the debut flight of a Blue Origin rocket with his brother, Funk and a yet-to-be-named passenger who paid for a seat on the flight at a \$28m charity auction last month.

Branson said he was honoured to be able to help “ensure his business delivers a unique customer experience”.

“I truly believe that space belongs to all of us,” he said. “I’ve always been a dreamer. My mum taught me to never give up and to reach for the stars. On July 11, it’s time to turn that dream into a reality aboard the next @VirginGalactic,” he said via Twitter.

On Wednesday, Branson had declined to say when he would travel because of restrictions placed on him by his publicly traded company. But he stressed he was healthy and fit to fly as soon as his engineers give him the go ahead. He will turn 71 a week after the scheduled launch.



Jeff Bezos, left, with Wally Funk, the 82-year-old who will join the Amazon founder on the Blue Origin flight planned for 20 July. Photograph: AP

Branson, Bezos, the world's richest man, and [Elon Musk](#), the maverick chief executive of the electric car maker Tesla and founder of the aerospace company SpaceX, are vying for control of the burgeoning public-private space industry.

In a recent Instagram video Bezos, who acquired the Washington Post in 2013 for \$250m, said he had dreamed of space travel since he was five.

['No one has waited longer': trailblazing female pilot Wally Funk will go to space with Bezos](#)

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"If you see Earth from space, it changes you," he said. "It changes your relationship with this planet, with humanity. It's one Earth. It's an adventure."

The three competitors have developed quite different technologies. [Virgin Galactic](#) launches its rocket ship from an aircraft, reaching an altitude of roughly 55 miles (88km). Blue Origin launches its New Shepard rocket from the ground, with its capsule soaring to about 66 miles. Both those altitudes are considered the edge of space. By comparison, SpaceX launches its capsules – crew and cargo – into Earth orbit.

The main objectives of the next [Virgin Galactic](#) test flight will be “evaluating … seat comfort, the weightless experience and the views of Earth” in the space cabin, [Virgin Galactic](#) said.

The company said it also wanted to demonstrate the conditions for conducting human-tended research experiments and confirm the training programme at Spaceport America supported the spaceflight experience.

Michael Colglazier, the chief executive officer of Virgin Galactic, said: “Our next flight – the 22nd flight test for VSS Unity and our first fully crewed flight test – is a testament to the dedication and technical brilliance of our entire team, and I’d like to extend a special thank you to our pilots and mission specialists, each of whom will be performing important work.”

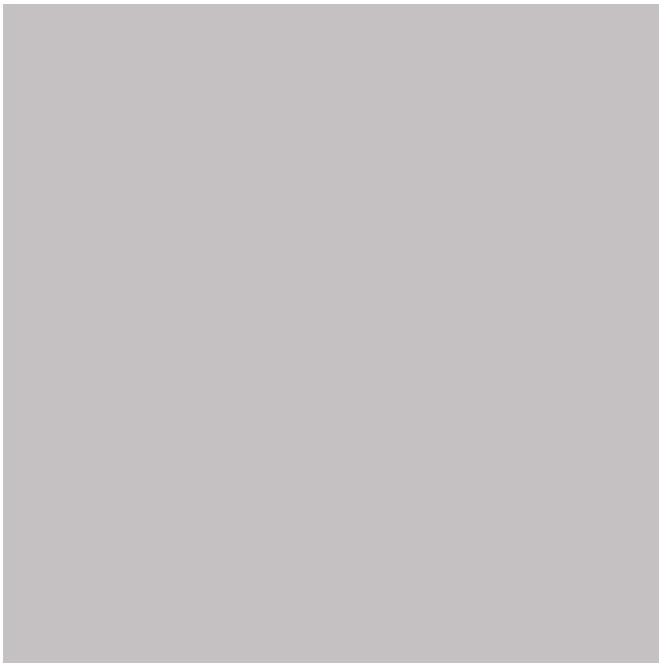
In April, Nasa awarded Musk’s SpaceX the lucrative and highly sought after contract to [build the lunar lander](#) that will spearhead its ambitious [Artemis programme](#), which aims to return humans to the moon for the first time since the final Apollo mission in 1972.

Associated Press and Press Association contributed to this report

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[Coronavirus](#)

Ministers urged to keep some Covid restrictions after 19 July due to ‘alarming’ rise in cases

Leading doctors are urging the government to keep ‘sensible, cautious’ measures in place to minimise spread of virus

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The British Medical Association has urged the government to keep some requirements, such as wearing masks on public transport and in shops.
Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

The British Medical Association has urged the government to keep some requirements, such as wearing masks on public transport and in shops.
Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

Guardian staff and agency

Sat 3 Jul 2021 02.57 EDT

Leading doctors are urging the government to keep some measures in place in England after 19 July in a bid to help control the spread of Covid amid the “alarming” rise in cases.

The British Medical Association (BMA) said that keeping some protective measures in place was “crucial” to stop spiralling cases numbers having a “devastating impact” on people’s health, the NHS, the economy and education.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, BMA council chair, said easing restrictions was not an “all or nothing” decision, and that “sensible, cautious” measures would be vital to minimising the impact of further waves, new variants and lockdowns.

[Germany may soon relax Covid rules for double-jabbed Britons](#)

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“As case numbers continue to rise at an alarming rate due to the rapid transmission of the Delta variant and an increase in people mixing with one another, it makes no sense to remove restrictions in their entirety in just over two weeks’ time” he said.

“The promise was to make decisions based on data and not dates, and while we were pleased to see the government react to data in delaying the easing on 21 June last month, ministers must not now simply disregard the most recent, damning, numbers by rushing into meeting their new 19 July deadline.”

The call comes amid reports that ministers plan to drop all legal requirements including self-isolation for fully vaccinated people who come into contact with someone who is infected.

The Times reported that a meeting of the Covid operations committee will take place on Monday at which ministers are expected to sign off a plan that will mean the fully vaccinated will be “advised” to take daily tests but not be required to do so.

Meanwhile, the German chancellor Angela Merkel has said [double-jabbed Britons should be able to have a holiday in Europe](#) without quarantine in the “foreseeable future”.

She said travel restrictions are being reviewed for those who have received two coronavirus vaccinations, after holding talks with Boris Johnson at Chequers on Friday.

But she revealed she had expressed “grave concern” over the number of football fans being allowed to attend Euro 2020 matches at Wembley.

Johnson has said he has increasing confidence that he can go ahead with the final phase of his plans to end England’s lockdown on 19 July to “get back to life as close to it was before Covid”.

The new health secretary, Sajid Javid, earlier this week also confirmed his intention for Step 4 of the road map to go ahead at that point, but he stopped short of confirming to MPs that will mean the end of every measure.

Public Health England figures show a total of 161,981 confirmed and probable cases of Delta variant have now been identified in the UK – up by 50,824, or 46%, on the previous week.

[Covid: entry rules for UK travellers to holiday hotspots across Europe](#)

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The Delta variant, which was first identified in India, continues to account for approximately 95% of confirmed cases of coronavirus across the UK.

Meanwhile, the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that about [one in 260 people](#) in private households in England had Covid in the week to 26 June.

This is up from one in 440 in the previous week and the highest level since the week to 27 February.

Nagpaul said that, while the hospitalisations remained low compared to the rise in cases, the numbers were “increasing at pace” with twice as many Covid patients in beds and on ventilators than this time last month.

“Even if people aren’t getting admitted to hospital at the same rate, spiralling levels of community transmission provides a fertile ground for new, potentially vaccine-resistant variants to develop,” he said.

He stressed that the BMA was not asking for a “full delay” of 19 July but a series of “targeted measures” to help prevent transmission of the virus.

These include requiring people to continue wearing masks in enclosed public areas such as on public transport and in shops, and “significantly improved” public messaging emphasising that practising social distancing and meeting outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces – and wearing masks when this is not possible – remains the best way to reduce risk of infection.

“Everyone appreciates the efforts and sacrifices we have all made so far to suppress the spread of the virus, and it would be tragic if we were to undo this good work now,” said Nagpaul.

“We are not asking for a full delay on 19 July, rather a series of sensible, targeted measures that will help prevent transmission of the virus while having a minimal impact on people’s daily lives.”

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[The Observer](#)[Morrisons](#)

Morrisons agrees £6.3bn takeover bid from investment group

Bid for UK's fourth largest supermarket would be biggest private equity deal since £11bn takeover of Boots in 2007

[Who are the American investors making a move on Morrisons?](#)

[Morrisons takeover saga could bring lots more twists before it's in the bag](#)



A Morrisons store in St Albans. Photograph: Peter Cziborra/Reuters

A Morrisons store in St Albans. Photograph: Peter Cziborra/Reuters

[Sarah Butler](#)

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Sat 3 Jul 2021 07.34 EDT

Morrisons has given the green light to a £6.3bn takeover deal led by the American investment firm which controls Majestic Wine.

If it succeeds, the bid for the UK's fourth largest supermarket would be the biggest private equity deal since the £11bn takeover of Boots in 2007.

MPs called for any deal to be “closely scrutinised” to protect jobs and pensions, and said the company’s ability to ensure food supply during disruptions such as those caused by the pandemic must not compromised.

Fortress, which is owned by the Japanese investment giant SoftBank, has teamed up with the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board and the Koch family, billionaire US industrialists who are known for their libertarian and conservative activism.

The agreed deal, which values the equity of Morrisons at £6.3bn, plus £3.2bn of net debt, leapfrogs a £5.52bn proposal from US private equity firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice (CD&R), which Morrisons directors rejected on 19 June, saying it was far too low. It is not clear if CD&R will return with a higher bid.

[MP queries watchdog’s ability to protect UK jobs amid private equity deals](#)
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Under the terms of the Fortress-led deal, Morrisons shareholders will receive 254p a share, comprising 252p in cash and a 2p cash dividend. That is a 4% premium to the 243p Morrisons share price closed at on Friday but a premium of 42% to its closing share price of 178p on 18 June – the last business day before CD&R’s proposal.

Andrew Higginson, the chair of Morrisons, said: “The Morrisons directors believe that the offer represents a fair and recommendable price for shareholders which recognises Morrisons’ future prospects.

“Morrisons is an outstanding business and our performance through the pandemic has further improved our standing and enabled us to enter the discussions with Fortress from a hard-won position of strength.

“We have looked very carefully at Fortress’s approach, their plans for the business and their overall suitability as an owner of a unique British food-

maker and shopkeeper with over 110,000 colleagues and an important role in British food production and farming.”

Fortress said it would keep Morrison’s head office in Bradford and its existing management team and was “fully supportive” of the company’s recent increase in pay to £10 an hour for shop floor staff.

Morrisons owns most of the buildings which house its stores, making it a valuable target for private equity buyers who might want to turn a quick profit by selling buildings which the supermarket would then have to lease back. Fortress attempted to allay concerns, saying it did not anticipate engaging in any material sale and leaseback transactions of Morrisons stores.

Joshua Pack, managing partner of Fortress, said: “We believe in making long-term investments focused on providing strong management teams with the necessary flexibility and support to execute their strategy in a sustainable and value-enhancing manner.

“We fully recognise Morrisons’ rich history and the very important role Morrisons plays for colleagues, customers, members of the Morrisons pension schemes, local communities, partner suppliers and farmers.”

The deal comes hot on the heels of a takeover of Asda, the UK’s third largest supermarket, which was backed by private equity group TDR Capital and led by the [Issa brothers](#), the Bury-based entrepreneurs behind petrol station operator EG Group.

Private equity firms have [snapped up more UK companies](#) in the last 18 months than at any time since the financial crisis in a £52bn deal frenzy, according to data from Dealogic, raising fears of “asset stripping” and job losses.

Supermarkets’ assets look particularly attractive to private bidders as share prices have taken a hit after [profits fell in the past year](#), owing to higher costs of handling the Covid crisis cancelling out the benefits from booming sales.

Seema Malhotra, shadow minister for business and consumers, said: “The government’s indifferent approach to takeovers means British businesses are far too often bought by companies with short-term aims and without the interests of the British economy, businesses, workers and customers in mind.

“Britain’s supermarkets provide an essential national service and the Covid crisis has highlighted their importance to customers, communities and our retail and farming industries.

“Any takeover bid must therefore be closely scrutinised by the government. Ministers must urgently work with Morrisons and the consortium to ensure that crucial commitments to protect the workforce and the pension scheme are legally binding, and met.”

Richard Lim, the chief executive of industry analysts Retail Economics, said of the Morrisons deal: “This signals the biggest shakeup in the UK grocery sector for over a decade. The grocery sector is transitioning through a period of enormous change as the impact of the pandemic has shifted buying behaviour. Navigating the fast-paced change in market dynamics, customer behaviour and the pressures on the food supply chain in a post-Brexit environment will be no easy feat.”

Fortress is a global investment manager with about \$53bn (£38bn) in assets under management as of March. The company is best known for investing in distressed companies but has previously put money into US supermarket Albertsons, and bought out Tesco’s failed venture into the US, Fresh & Easy.

Morrisons said an initial unsolicited proposal was received from Fortress on 4 May at 220p a share. Fortress then made four subsequent proposals before its offer reached a total value of 254p a share on 5 June.

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[The ObserverUkraine](#)

'Idiotic': Fury in Ukraine after female soldiers made to march in heels

Female troops were photographed practising for a parade wearing high heels, sparking outrage among lawmakers



A handout photograph taken and released by the Ukrainian Defence ministry press-service on July 2, 2021 shows the Ukrainian female soldiers wearing heels while taking part in the the military parade rehearsal in Kiev.
Photograph: Ukrainian Defence ministry press/AFP/Getty Images

A handout photograph taken and released by the Ukrainian Defence ministry press-service on July 2, 2021 shows the Ukrainian female soldiers wearing heels while taking part in the the military parade rehearsal in Kiev.
Photograph: Ukrainian Defence ministry press/AFP/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse
Fri 2 Jul 2021 20.21 EDT

Ukrainian authorities have found themselves buried in controversy after official pictures showed female soldiers practising for a parade in heels.

Ukraine is preparing to stage a military parade next month to mark 30 years of independence following the Soviet Union's breakup, and the defence ministry on Friday released photographs of fatigue-clad women soldiers marching in mid-heel black pumps.

[Russia to pull back troops from Crimea and Ukraine border](#)

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“Today, for the first time, training takes place in heeled shoes,” cadet Ivanna Medvid was quoted as saying by the defence ministry’s information site ArmiaInform.

“It is slightly harder than in army boots but we are trying,” Medvid added in comments released on Thursday.



The scandal erupted after the Defense Ministry released photos of a rehearsal of the parade to be held to mark the 30th anniversary of Ukraine's independence on 24 August. Photograph: Ukrainian Defence ministry press/AFP/Getty Images

Several Ukrainian lawmakers close to Ukraine's former president Petro Poroshenko showed up in parliament with pairs of shoes and encouraged the defence minister to wear high heels to the parade.

"It is hard to imagine a more idiotic, harmful idea," said Inna Sovsun, a member of the Golos party, pointing to health risks.

She also said that Ukraine's women soldiers – like men – were risking their lives and "do not deserve to be mocked".

Ukraine has been battling Russian-backed separatists in the country's industrial east, in a conflict that has killed more than 13,000 people since 2014.

Olena Kondratyuk, deputy speaker of the legislature said authorities should publicly apologise for "humiliating" women and conduct an enquiry.

Kondratyuk said that more than 13,500 women had fought in the current conflict.



Members of the Ukrainian Parliament brought high-heeled shoes to the rostrum of the Verkhovna Rada in protest and demanded an investigation into the incident. Photograph: Sergii Kharchenko/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

More than 31,000 women now serve in the Ukrainian armed forces, including more than 4,000 of whom are officers.

The choice of footwear sparked a torrent of criticism on social media and in parliament, and led to accusations that women soldiers had been sexualised.

“The story of a parade in heels is a real disgrace,” commentator Vitaly Portnikov said on Facebook, arguing that some Ukrainian officials had a “medieval” mindset.

Another commentator, Maria Shapranova, accused the defence ministry of “sexism and misogyny.”

“High heels is a mockery of women imposed by the beauty industry,” she wrote.

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Hampton Court Palace flower show

‘Anyone can garden’: Hampton Court flower show puts community centre stage

The festival returns for the first time since the pandemic, with an emphasis on getting growing, no matter how small your space



Preparation taking place At the Down Memory Lane, a garden designed in conjunction with Alzheimer’s Society for the RHS Hampton Court Palace festival. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Preparation taking place At the Down Memory Lane, a garden designed in conjunction with Alzheimer’s Society for the RHS Hampton Court Palace festival. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Anna Bawden Social affairs correspondent

Sat 3 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

As the UK’s biggest flower show opens its gates for the first time since the pandemic, the Royal Horticultural Society is on a mission to persuade

visitors that gardening is for everyone.

The [RHS Hampton Court Palace garden festival](#), which runs from Tuesday and is its first big show since 2019, puts community gardening centre stage. This focus comes after millions of people took up growing plants on their balconies, windowsills or in their gardens during lockdown. The UK's passion for gardening has continued even as restrictions have eased. According to latest figures from the Horticultural Trades Association, in the year to May 2021, [garden centre sales were up 30%](#).



Stephanie Hafferty's No Dig garden illustrates why you don't need to dig the soil to get good crops. Photograph: Luke Macgregor/RHS

Sue Biggs, RHS director general said: "Following the huge increase in the number of people growing and gardening, we wanted the first major RHS show of the year to be a celebration of gardening for everyone."

On Monday, the RHS launches a [community award](#) to celebrate the difference gardening can make to the lives of individuals and communities, as well as to the environment. The award will be open to anyone in the UK who has made an outstanding contribution to a community gardening programme, be that a communal orchard, meadow or vegetable patch.

Nominations are open until the autumn and winners will be announced at next year's show.

Tim Upson, the director of horticulture, education and communities at the RHS, said: "We know that community gardening groups increasingly have a role to play in tackling loneliness and fostering a sense of togetherness. Gardening has long been a force for good and it's time we recognised this."

The [physical and mental benefits of gardening](#) are well documented. A [2020 survey](#) by the RHS found that nearly three-quarters of people with access to a garden, courtyard or balcony, said it had helped their mental health during lockdown. It follows [analysis](#) of data from nearly 8,000 people, which showed that those who spent time in their garden were significantly more likely to report higher psychological wellbeing than those who did not.

The belief that gardening is for everyone features in some of the show gardens too. Down Memory Lane aims to provide solace and comfort for people living with dementia and their carers, while the Ability Garden is designed with mobile raised beds and a circular raised space so that wheelchair users can grow plants easily.



Amanda Grimes in her Punk Rockery garden: 'It doesn't have to be difficult or time consuming.' Photograph: Luke Macgregor/RHS

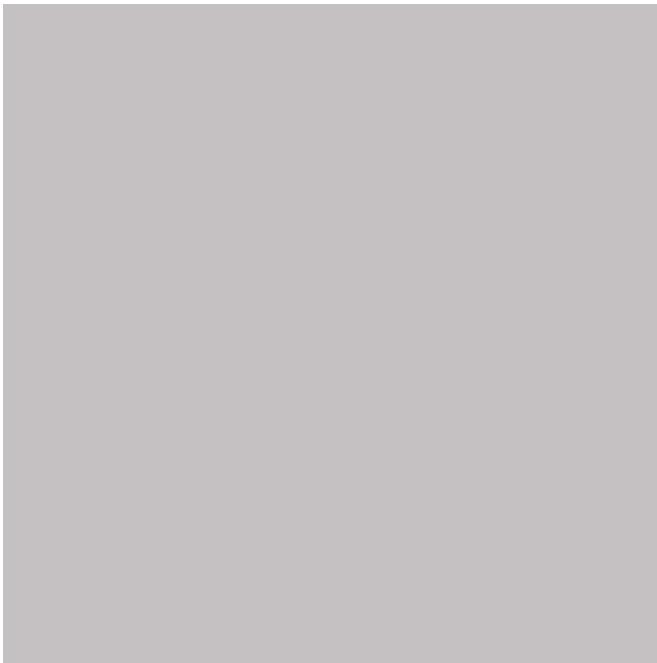
Other highlights include the RHS allotment, divided into 14 plots grown by different local groups, which focuses on the communal benefits of growing flowers, fruit and vegetables, and the No Dig demonstration garden by [Charles Dowding](#) and the organic grower [Stephanie Hafferty](#), which illustrates [why you don't need to dig the soil to get good crops](#). And under a new category of “Get Started Gardens”, two first-time designers create outdoor spaces for beginner gardeners.

“Anyone can garden with what they have in their back garden, patio or on their windowsill,” said Amanda Grimes, who designed the Punk Rockery Get Started Garden. “It doesn’t have to be difficult or time consuming.”

Biggs added: “We hope many more are encouraged to get growing, no matter how small their growing space is.”

The RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden festival runs from Tuesday 6 July to Sunday 11 July

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UK news

Man charged with murder after Oxford Circus stabbing

Tedi Fanta Hagos, 25, charged over fatal stabbing of 60-year-old man in central London on Friday evening



Police at the scene of the fatal stabbing on Friday evening. Photograph: @okubax/PA

Police at the scene of the fatal stabbing on Friday evening. Photograph: @okubax/PA

PA Media

Sat 3 Jul 2021 05.34 EDT

A man has been charged with murder after a 60-year-old was stabbed in central London.

Tedi Fanta Hagos, 25, of Ravenhill, Swansea, was charged with murder and possession of an offensive weapon on Friday and is expected to appear at Westminster magistrates court on Saturday, Scotland Yard said.

Police were called shortly before 8pm on Thursday to reports of a man stabbed at Oxford Circus, close to the junction with Regent Street.

Officers, London ambulance service and London's air ambulance attended the scene where a 60-year-old man was found with stab injuries. He was taken to hospital where he later died. The victim has not yet been named.

The Met said his next of kin had been informed and were being supported by specially trained officers. A postmortem will take place in due course.

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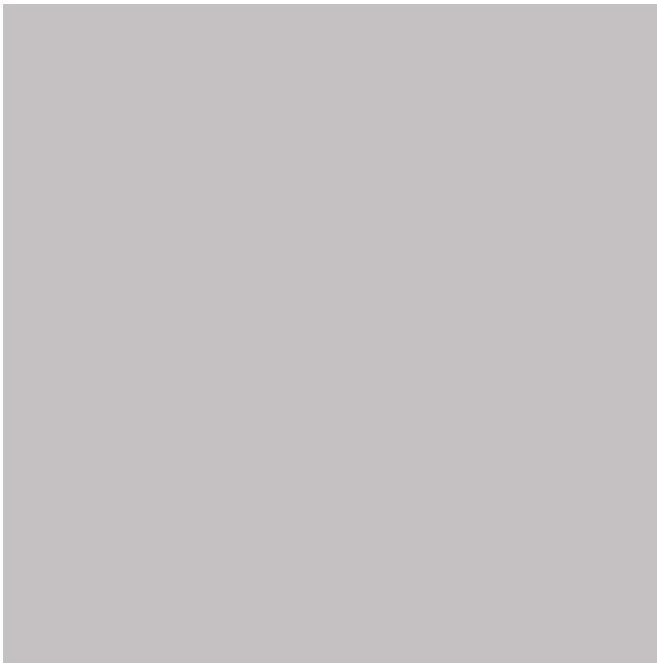
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[Hospitality industry](#)

Test-and-trace rules ‘wreaking havoc’ for pubs and restaurants

Hospitality bosses warn of backdoor lockdown if self-isolation rules are not changed when Covid restrictions end

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Jeremy Horrill, centre, with two members of his staff at Telford's Warehouse bar and restaurant in Chester. Photograph: Colin McPherson/The Guardian

Jeremy Horrill, centre, with two members of his staff at Telford's Warehouse bar and restaurant in Chester. Photograph: Colin McPherson/The Guardian

*Sarah Butler
@whatbutlersaw*

Fri 2 Jul 2021 16.02 EDT

Bars, pubs and clubs may be forced into a backdoor lockdown beyond 19 July unless the government changes test-and-trace rules, industry bosses

have warned.

Businesses across the country from Edinburgh to Chester, Oxford and London are being hit by waves of closures as staff are forced to self-isolate after being alerted by the [NHS](#) test and trace app over coming into contact with someone with Covid.

Under the current rules, workers who have come within 2 metres of a person with the virus must stay at home for 10 days even if they are vaccinated and have tested negative.

“The current guidelines are wreaking havoc among hospitality businesses and in essence enacting a further lockdown on large parts of the sector,” said Kate Nicholls, the chief executive of the trade body UKHospitality.

“If we continue down this road we will be besieged by individual business lockdowns, hindering the recovery of the sector as we start to ease restrictions,” said Michael Kill, the chief executive of the Night Time Industry Association, which represents thousands of pubs, clubs and bars.

“We are being inundated with businesses having to close due to staff being notified by test and trace, meaning thousands of workers are having to be sent home under the current isolation guidelines.”

About 400,000 people were reportedly instructed to quarantine last week by NHS test and trace staff or their NHS Covid app. The Adam Smith Institute thinktank has suggested that the number of people self-isolating could rise to 1.7 million by the end of next month.

The isolation rules and NHS app are causing havoc for businesses around the country with some towns seeing large parts of their entertainment district shuttered for weeks on end.



The Zuger's of Chester coffee house and restaurant had to close after a group of staff were alerted by the NHS test and trace app. Photograph: Handout

In Chester about 20 venues were forced to close in different waves over about three weeks.

“You get up and running again, you think: ‘That’s it we’re back’ and then all of a sudden you’re closed again,” says Lee-Ann Helbling, the manager of Zuger’s coffee shop and restaurant in Chester. The venue had to close after a group of staff went for drinks elsewhere and were alerted by the NHS app that they had come into contact with a positive case.

“It needs someone to stand up and say this nonsense has got to stop,” says William Lees-Jones, the managing director of JW Lees, which runs 42 managed pubs and hotels in north-west England.

He says the number of his staff being asked to self-isolate by the NHS app has tripled in past few weeks from about 20 to more than 60 with the vast majority of those not ill or testing positive for Covid.

The group has had to close six venues as staff have been forced to self-isolate after being alerted by the NHS test and trace app on top of about a

dozen that remain closed because they are music venues or too small to accommodate social-distancing measures.

“It has been a nightmare,” says Lees-Jones.

“With test and trace [the government] seems to have spent a lot of money on it and it doesn’t work. People have got to be asking big questions. We can’t have hundreds of thousands of people isolating because of a technology system, particularly when they aren’t ill.”

Ministers have considered plans to allow those who have had both Covid jabs to take daily tests instead, but it is not clear if changes will be in place by 19 July when lockdown is eased further.

UKHospitality is calling for a “test and remain” system in which vaccinated staff who have not tested positive for Covid can carry on working even if they have come into contact with a person carrying the virus.

“Testing needs to play a crucial role in how we learn to live with the virus and releasing people from isolation. We can no longer have a system that requires healthy, vaccinated and uninfected people to stay at home rather than go to work,” said Nicholls.

While many Chester venues have reopened, they fear more closures soon unless the rules are changed. And business owners warn the financial costs are mounting up, putting local jobs at risk.



The Chester Townhouse hotel was forced to close for nine days after a member of the kitchen staff tested positive. Photograph: Handout

One of the town's bars, Telford's Warehouse, closed for a week after a member of the kitchen staff was pinged by the NHS app and he had been in contact with both serving and back-of-house members. While all tested negative at the time, they had to remain off work.

[Hospitality industry warns of looming crisis as staff forced to isolate](#)
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“It is a precarious situation,” says the bar’s owner, Jeremy Horrill. “I lost thousands of pounds of profitability. Everybody went back on furlough that could. I lost stock as we are a real ale pub and nothing lasts more than a week. It is completely down to the luck of the draw.”

Steven Hesketh, the owner of the Townhouse hotel, said he made a “huge loss” when his business was forced to close for nine days after a member of the kitchen staff caught Covid.

The venue is now open, but Hesketh is having to work in the kitchen this weekend as one of his members of staff is isolating while a family member waits for test results.

“We are holding out for 19 July, but if that doesn’t come with some solution on isolation we may still have to close if another outbreak comes in our small team,” Hesketh says.

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Coronavirus

Germany may soon relax Covid rules for double-jabbed Britons

Angela Merkel says British travellers could be allowed into the country without needing to isolate

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01:05

'Wurst is behind us' in EU sausage row, says Boris Johnson – video

*Aubrey Allegretti
@breeallegretti*

Fri 2 Jul 2021 11.26 EDT

British travellers who have had two Covid vaccines may soon be allowed quarantine-free entry into Germany, Angela Merkel has said, as [Boris Johnson](#) sought to smooth over post-Brexit tensions by declaring: “The wurst is over.”

Speaking on her final trip to the UK before stepping down from the role she has held since 2005, the German chancellor said she only put tougher border restrictions in force for people coming from Britain because of uncertainty about the Delta variant.

While the variant was “increasing very rapidly” in [Germany](#), Merkel said, changes would be made in the “foreseeable future” to let people who have been double-jabbed into the country without the need to isolate.

The announcement, made at a press conference alongside Johnson at Chequers on Friday, was welcomed by the prime minister as “great” news.

Merkel had last week urged other EU nations to impose tougher travel restrictions due to a significant spread of the Delta variant in England, which ballooned after ministers delayed putting India on the red list.

The chancellor was more positive on Friday, saying “in the beginning we didn’t have that much experience with this variant” but that Berlin and all other countries’ governments would “adjust time and again to the most recent developments”.

Germany coronavirus cases

Germany is on the UK’s amber list, meaning anyone arriving from there must quarantine at home for 10 days, but can be released on day six if they test negative. Ministers have said the isolation requirement for British travellers who are fully inoculated when they return from amber countries will be dropped – probably from the start of August.

Merkel was also buoyant about the possibility of changes to the Northern Ireland protocol – a key part of the Brexit deal that imposed checks on some goods moving across the Irish Sea – saying “pragmatic solutions” could be found.

An extension to grace periods allowing businesses to forgo checks on chilled meats was agreed last month, leading Johnson to declare on Friday that “the wurst is behind us”.

He admitted there were still “a lot of issues to be solved” but insisted: “I’m sure, with goodwill and patience, we can sort it out.”

Despite their united front, Merkel appeared uneasy about the size of crowds allowed to gather for Euro 2020 football matches. She said she had “grave concern” about the potential spread of Covid and that while it was up to the British government to make its own decisions, “I’m very much concerned whether it’s not a bit too much.”

Johnson insisted he was confident the final phase of unlocking meant to take place on 21 June but delayed by four weeks would go ahead on 19 July,

saying vaccines had helped build up a “wall of immunity” and that there was a “great degree of resistance to the virus in the UK population”.

Addressing concern that the EU’s vaccine passport system does not recognise AstraZeneca vaccines produced by the Serum Institute in India, Johnson said he saw no reason why they should not be accepted. “I’m very confident that that will not prove to be a problem,” he said.

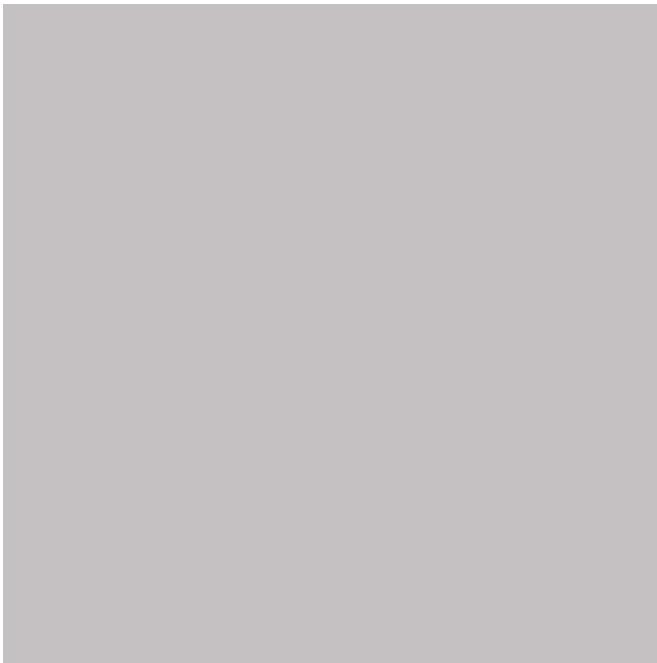
During their socially distanced press conference, to which only four journalists were invited to ask questions, Merkel also reflected on her relationship with Johnson – a tricky one given their many disagreements over Brexit.

The German chancellor said cooperation with her British counterpart had gone “very, very well”, though she added: “We look at each other, we look at how different people can be and then we make the best of it.”

As one of the world’s longest-serving elected political leaders, Merkel has worked with five UK prime ministers: Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, Theresa May and Johnson.

Merkel said she “really liked all” of them and their different personalities, and vowed to “continue to cooperate very well” with Johnson “in the time remaining to me”.

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Coronavirus

Thailand reports record Covid-19 cases as concerns mount about vaccine shortages

Health authorities reported more than 6,200 new Covid-19 cases on Saturday, setting a record for a third straight day



The gymnasium of Narathiwat Rajanagarindra University is converted into a field hospital facility for Covid-19 patients in Thailand's southern province of Narathiwat amid an increase in cases. Photograph: Madaree Tohlala/AFP/Getty Images

The gymnasium of Narathiwat Rajanagarindra University is converted into a field hospital facility for Covid-19 patients in Thailand's southern province of Narathiwat amid an increase in cases. Photograph: Madaree Tohlala/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press
Sat 3 Jul 2021 00.36 EDT

Health authorities in [Thailand](#) reported more than 6,200 new Covid-19 cases on Saturday, setting a record for a third straight day, as concerns mounted over shortages of treatment facilities and vaccine supplies.

Officials also reported 41 deaths, bringing the total to 2,181.

About 90% of Thailand's more than 271,000 reported coronavirus cases and 95% of the deaths have been recorded during a surge that began in early April. There were 992 deaths in June, more than 15 times Thailand's total for all of 2020.

[Phuket reopens to tourists one year after Covid forced Thai borders to close](#)
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The number of patients in ICUs and on ventilators has risen nationwide over the past two weeks.

The government's Center for Covid-19 Situation Administration said 39% of the new cases reported were in Bangkok, 25% in neighbouring provinces and 36% in the other 71 provinces. Center deputy spokesperson Apisamai Srirangsan said Bangkok authorities must urgently set up isolation stations to separate infected people in their local communities and add beds for treatment of serious cases.

Since the beginning of the year, critics have said that the government of prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha has failed to secure timely and adequate vaccine supplies, and efforts to obtain more have proceeded slowly.

Experts at a Health Ministry briefing on Friday painted a grim picture of how to prioritise who gets vaccinated.

Epidemiologist Kamnuan Ungchoosak said the arrival of the Delta variant of the virus, believed to be more contagious, could push the number of deaths up to 1,400 in July and more in coming months.

He said 80% of the deaths are among elderly people and people with chronic diseases, and if they are vaccinated it could significantly reduce the death rate while also lowering the demand for ICU beds. About 10% of elderly

and infirm patients die, while the rate for those age 20-40 is less than 0.1%, he said.

But at the same time, significant outbreaks are occurring among other groups, including people in construction worker camps and restaurant workers, who also need to be vaccinated, he said.

“We currently have closed the camps and businesses, but the number of cases is not declining and the economy is bad. But if we focus on old people and those who have chronic diseases, we might not have to shut down the businesses and the bed demands from these two groups will also decline,” Kamnuan said.

Prayuth has targeted [mid-October for opening up the country to vaccinated visitors](#) from abroad without quarantines.

[Thailand starts Covid vaccine drive using jabs made by king's firm](#)
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Sopon Mekthon, chairman of the government’s subcommittee on Covid-19 vaccine management, said only two million of about 16 million old and infirm people have received vaccines.

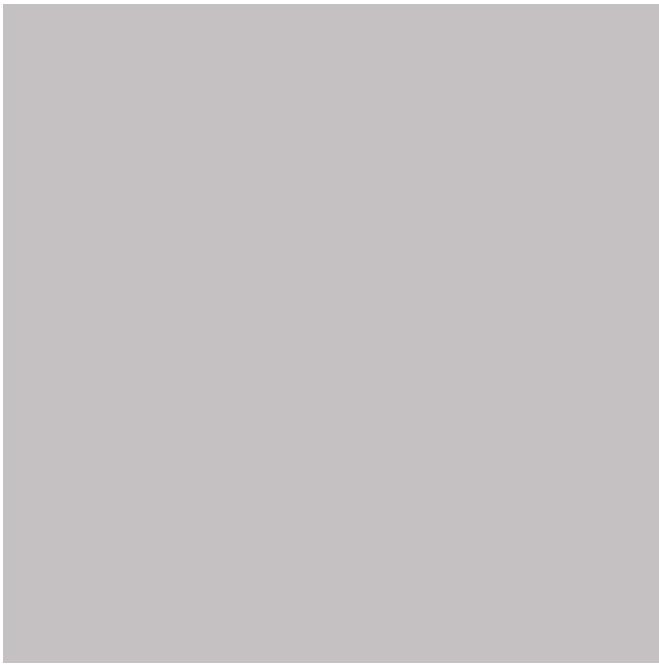
Nakorn Premsri, director of the National Vaccine Institute, said a Thai company, Siam BioScience, was supposed to provide the country with 10m doses a month of the locally produced AstraZeneca vaccine, but that has been cut to 5-6m doses. [The company, owned by Thailand's king](#), reportedly has had production problems. It also has contracts to provide vaccines to other countries.

He said Thailand is trying to negotiate with other producers to fill the gap. So far, Thailand has only used vaccines from AstraZeneca and China’s Sinovac and Sinopharm, although the government says it has agreements to also buy from Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

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Labour's byelection victory was a strike against the politics of division

Keir Starmer

Kim Leadbeater's win, in the face of aggression and dishonesty, was about uniting people. That is what my party stands for

- Keir Starmer is leader of the Labour party
- [Party leader hails Kim Leadbeater as the future of Labour](#)



'The values of Kim's campaign won through – decency, honesty and integrity.' Keir Starmer with Kim Leadbeater at Cleckheaton memorial park, West Yorkshire, following her Batley and Spen by-election victory. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

'The values of Kim's campaign won through – decency, honesty and integrity.' Keir Starmer with Kim Leadbeater at Cleckheaton memorial park, West Yorkshire, following her Batley and Spen by-election victory. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 2 Jul 2021 12.30 EDT

When I was with Kim Leadbeater in Batley and Spen a few weeks ago, I was struck by two things. First, that I had never seen such warmth and affection for a candidate from local people. Whether we were in the high street or having dinner in a local pub, people came up to say hello, to wish the campaign well and to offer their support. These weren't traditional [Labour](#) voters, but people from across the local community – people who hadn't voted [Labour](#) for years, but knew Kim was one of their own. Someone who would always put Batley and Spen first.

But I was also struck by the [toxic atmosphere](#) that hung over the byelection. The intimidation, hatred and lies that seeped into the contest and threatened to dominate it. A few days later we would see all too clearly the consequences of this, with [violence and aggression](#) against Kim, our activists and our members. That this should happen in Batley and Spen, of all places, and to Kim, of all candidates, was disgraceful.

And it's why Batley and Spen wasn't just another byelection. It was so much more. It was a victory for hope over hate. Decency over division. Truth over lies.

[Brexit: Angela Merkel calls on Boris Johnson to find ‘pragmatic solutions’ on Northern Ireland protocol – live](#)

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I entered parliament at the same time as Jo Cox. Our kids are around the same age. We were good friends and I miss her dearly. I can imagine how proud Jo would have been to see her sister winning this byelection and defeating those who wanted to divide her local community. Showing, once more, that there is more that we have in common than that which divides us.

This was a victory against the odds, the polls and the predictions. And the values of Kim's campaign won through – decency, honesty and integrity. Those are the values that define the Labour party that I lead.

For too long our politics has been dominated by those who want to divide us – and those who think that decency, honesty and integrity aren't important. As a result, our politics has been polarised – and trivialised. The gap between Westminster and “real life” has become more pronounced, and faith

in politics as a force for change – and a force for good – has been diminished. And why wouldn’t it, when we have a prime minister who basks in his own dishonesty? When cabinet ministers can do what they like without any threat of being sacked? And when a government operates on the basis that it’s one rule for them, and one rule for everyone else?

This byelection is a turning point, a sign that the politics of division and dishonesty won’t win out, that unity and decency can.

That fundamental divide, between integrity, honesty and decency, and misinformation, manipulation, half-truths and non-truths, is not just the divide in Batley and Spen. It has become one of the defining battles in our politics – whether in the UK, the US or across the world.

[Keir Starmer hails Kim Leadbeater as the future of Labour](#)
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I know which side my Labour party is on. We want to bring the country together, not push communities apart. Nobody embodies that spirit more clearly than Kim. And as we emerge from restrictions, there is now a real opportunity to harness the solidarity and national spirit that we’ve seen over the past year – to make sure that after the last year of sacrifice, we build a more united, fair and secure country. To rebuild our economy and our public services. To bring our communities back together. And to put honesty and integrity back at the heart of our politics.

In the coming weeks and months, I’ll be travelling across the country setting out Labour’s plan for the recovery – building on the ambitious £15bn [education recovery plan](#) we’ve already put forward to make sure no child is left behind because of the pandemic.

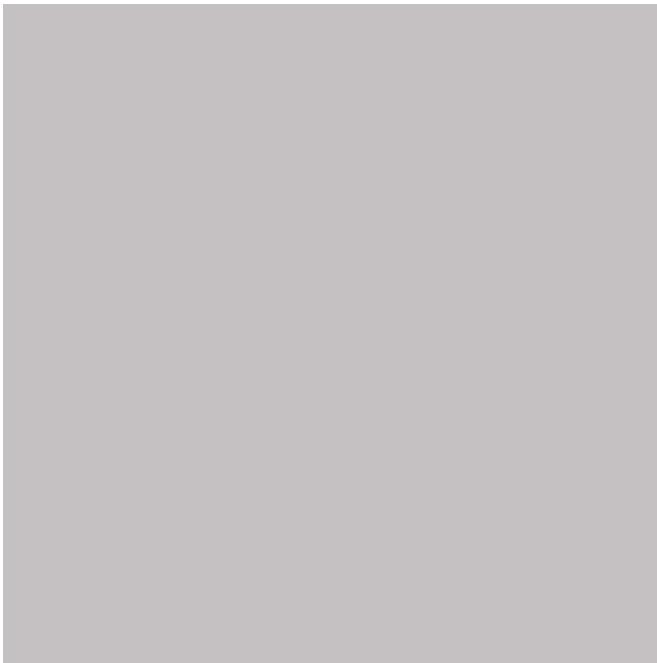
Batley and Spen was an important win – in the most difficult of circumstances. But it is only the start. I want to see more MPs like Kim. And for Labour to have more nights like the one we have just seen.

Labour’s back, and the promise of a better future is back too.

- Keir Starmer is leader of the Labour party and MP for Holborn and St Pancras
-

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George Galloway didn't have a monopoly on the dirty tricks in Batley and Spen

[Shami Chakrabarti](#)



His campaign was disgraceful, but Labour should be ashamed of its leaflet featuring Boris Johnson and Narendra Modi



A campaign poster for Workers party of Britain candidate George Galloway in Batley, West Yorkshire. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

A campaign poster for Workers party of Britain candidate George Galloway in Batley, West Yorkshire. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

Sat 3 Jul 2021 05.00 EDT

I wonder which will be remembered longest; the outcome of the Batley and Spen by-election, or the manner in which it was conducted? Labour won the seat by a narrow margin of 323 votes, but the interventions of divisive veteran George Galloway, who came third with 8,264 votes, turned the complex northern brew toxic. His campaign [stoked homophobic sentiment](#) – Galloway described himself as a “[straight white](#) man with six children” who would not stand “for the BBC trying to teach our young children that there are 99 genders” – and has been mired in accusations of intimidation. Though shocking, this came as little surprise to me.

I remember meeting Galloway in person in 2005 at a public meeting to discuss the [Labour](#) government’s identity card legislation. The temperature had been entirely civil; Tony Benn praised Dominic Grieve, saying “we libertarians meet around the back”. Then the doors to the hall swung open and the recently triumphant east London MP marched in, flanked by his many supporters. Galloway took to the stage with a lengthy rant about every

Middle Eastern conflict, yet had precious few words on the topic of the event. Sharing my discomfort, Benn whispered in my ear: “I know what you’re thinking”.

[Galloway bid for Batley and Spen seat mired in intimidation claims](#)

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Galloway has form for misogyny, having made offensive comments about forced marriage in the [hateful campaign](#) he ran against Naz Shah in Bradford West in 2015, and having speculated that sex assault allegations made against Julian Assange were merely [“bad sexual etiquette”](#). In his latest campaign, the dexterous shapeshifter has made hay from a nasty dispute about images of the prophet being shown in a classroom, one minute affirming people’s “right to defend religious sensibilities” and the next sidling up to self-styled “free speech activist” Lawrence Fox.

Of course, the Conservatives are virtuosos of such dog-whistle politics. Their attacks on Sadiq Khan have been consistently Islamophobic. In 2019, [I wrote](#) about a Tory London candidate who was stoking anti-Muslim sentiment to win votes. In West Yorkshire earlier this year, a local election leaflet warned: “Labour will take your vote for granted whilst taking the knee.” It may be hard to keep clean in the trenches and harder still to fight for human rights, equality and against corruption amid the deliberate stoking of culture wars. Still, this must surely be Labour’s path.

Congratulations to Kim Leadbeater, who showed admirable physical and moral courage for even entering the fray in the constituency in which her sister was murdered just five years ago; even more so for withstanding abuse with dignity. But [Labour’s leaflet](#) featuring Boris Johnson shaking hands with Indian premier Narendra Modi was a mistake for which the party must apologise. I hold no brief for the rightwing Hindu nationalist whose catastrophic pandemic mismanagement, misogyny and Islamophobia I find indefensible. But what was this photo and its caption, “the risk of voting for anyone but Labour is clear”, supposed to indicate? That a Labour prime minister or foreign secretary would never shake such a hand or attempt to negotiate trade, or peace, or a shamefully belated [vaccine patent waiver](#) with one of the largest nations in the global south? Pakistan has joined others co-

sponsoring the Indian and South African proposal for a waiver at the WTO, uniting the often rival nations against British and EU obstruction.

[Starmer has a little breathing space after Batley and Spen. He must use it wisely | Jonathan Freedland](#)

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There are many photographs of Johnson shaking hands with the former prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu. Is it now to be acceptable to use these on leaflets in areas with significant Muslim communities smarting from current events in Israel and Palestine? How could that do anything other than assume people vote solely on communal lines and make already vulnerable minorities even more afraid? There is no point in proclaiming zero tolerance for antisemitism and all forms of racism among party members if Labour undermines attempts at trying to explain the nuances of modern racism and stereotyping come election time. Whether Dominic Cummings at Barnard Castle or Matt Hancock in the office, haven't the Tories taught us something about the infinite dangers of double standards?

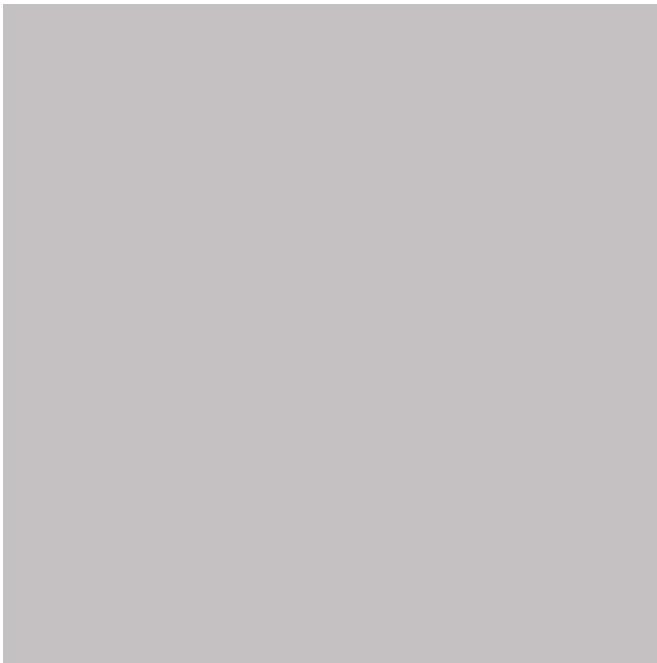
It is one thing to take foreign policy positions and argue for them, even during domestic elections, if that is what voters want to hear. I suspect the world has been now so shrunken by the pandemic, climate catastrophe and the legacy of empire that while transforming people's health, housing, education, care and livelihoods remain the priority, it is probably unrealistic to separate the international from the domestic in politics anywhere. Yet if the ultimate ambition is for peace over there, unity over here and greater justice everywhere, this must be demonstrated in Labour's campaigning as well as its policies.

Let the Battle for Batley of 2021 be remembered as a nadir in national discourse from which we learned and recovered, if only in the Labour party. Otherwise, what does it stand for?

- Lady Shami Chakrabarti was shadow attorney general for England and Wales from 2016 to 2020, and was director of Liberty from 2003 to 2016

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Dear Gavin Williamson, you are fiddling with anthems and phones: why not try helping schools?

[Michael Rosen](#)



Britain is scarcely ‘one nation’, nor does it have ‘open doors’ or ‘celebrate differences’ as the new anthem claims



One nation? The Welsh government said it was ‘not engaged’ with ‘One Britain, One Nation’ in schools; meanwhile, Scottish schools were on holiday. Photograph: Chris Fairweather/Huw Evans/Rex/Shutterstock

One nation? The Welsh government said it was ‘not engaged’ with ‘One Britain, One Nation’ in schools; meanwhile, Scottish schools were on holiday. Photograph: Chris Fairweather/Huw Evans/Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 3 Jul 2021 03.15 EDT

I do my best to focus on the content of your statements but I’ve noticed that you have a tendency to go back over territory you’ve already explored. I thought you had already given us the benefit of your thoughts on the [use of mobile phones](#) in schools but you must have decided it was so interesting the first time, we’d want to hear about it all over again. On 29 June I [read this](#): “The education secretary, Gavin Williamson, said he wants a ban on mobile phones,” having read almost the same on [7 April](#).

Geoff Barton, head of the headteachers’ union the Association of School and College Leaders, batted you away. In the spirit of Zoom conversations, I’ll pretend to bring Mr Barton in on this. Geoff began by telling the [Guardian](#): “The education secretary appears to be obsessed with the subject of mobile phones in schools.”

(Yes, Geoff, that's what I was beginning to think.)

Barton: "In reality, every school will already have a robust policy on the use of mobile phones. It isn't some sort of digital free-for-all."

(But, Geoff, Gavin doesn't seem to know or want to know this.)

Barton: "Frankly, school and college leaders would prefer the education secretary to be delivering an ambitious post-pandemic recovery plan and setting out how he intends to minimise educational disruption next term, rather than playing to backbenchers on the subject of behaviour."

(Ah, but good behaviour is what government ministers tell us to do but not do themselves.)

Let us muse on the tone deafness of you lecturing schools on "behaviour", Mr Williamson, when some of your colleagues so obviously need it more.

But then you've also contributed to the world of education with a new national anthem. Haven't we got one? I know people have toyed with this before: Billy Connolly thought the Archers' signature tune would be good. I thought a simple, easy-to-sing, easy-to-remember one would be the Greenwich time signal. We could all get behind beeping six times. But this new British anthem is not instead of the national anthem; it's in addition to it.

Your department encouraged schools to take part in One Britain One Nation day on 25 June, when our children would sing it. The campaign website urged schools to "do the following as a MUST please": encourage every child to clap for a minute to recognise and pay tribute to all those who helped during Covid and also sing the OBON Day 2021 anthem".

'Hyper-creepy': Gavin Williamson mocked over One Britain, One Nation song

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You called this project "amazing" and said it was "incredibly important that schools take part". In fact, you indicated that you had been pro-active about

this: “We have asked schools to participate, and I am happy to reiterate the endorsement of the project from the dispatch box and to encourage them to play their part in it.”

Unfortunately, you hadn’t noticed that children in what are still British schools in Scotland wouldn’t actually be in school to sing it, having finished for the summer, and then the Welsh government pointed out that education is devolved and said it was not “engaged” with the project.

So not “One Britain, One Nation” after all.

Which brings us to the words of national anthem 2. It urges us to think of Britain as “one great team”, a metaphor that unfortunately draws our attention to sporting teams. Aside from the Olympics, there’s not much evidence of British teams. Even rugby has now recognised that calling the Lions “British” was a decades-long misnomer (now rectified), as some of the players come from the Republic of Ireland.

The first verse tells us, “We’ve opened our doors”. Well, historians say, sometimes we have and sometimes we haven’t. Immigration acts have been around since at least as early as the Aliens Act of 1905, and the whole purpose of them is to close doors to some. For example, though governments love to celebrate this country’s welcome to Kindertransport children, this often overlooks the fact that many of those children never saw their parents again. “Our doors” weren’t open to them.

The verse goes on: “We celebrate our differences ...”

Do we? Is that how you would describe the “hostile environment”, the Windrush scandal, and the government-led mocking and downgrading of multiculturalism?

The verse closes with “United for ever, never apart”. I suppose this line has the advantage of teaching children the meaning of the word “hubris”. The Scottish referendum vote was pretty close and are you really sure that Northern Ireland will always be part of the UK?

Bizarrely, you've given your imprimatur to a song that talks in the second verse about "different races". Surely there is no room in schools to have children singing such unscientific tosh. Why would you encourage them to do so? The [American Society of Human Genetics](#) has said the very idea of "race" is a lie, as reported also in [Scientific American](#) several years ago. It said: "The Human Genome Project has confirmed that the genomes found around the globe are 99.9% identical in every person. Hence, the very idea of different 'races' is nonsense."

After this, the song fades away into repeated exhortations to unity, greatness and strength. It's all very muscular isn't it? For me, one of the "great" things that's happened recently is how the NHS (and allied scientists) – using minds, hearts, energy, love, training and science – has coped with a terrible pandemic, invented a vaccine and delivered it.

Should we ever need national anthem 3, perhaps it could invoke care for one another instead.

Yours, Michael Rosen

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Hadley Freeman's Weekend columnParents and parenting

Why be a performative Insta parent when your kids will be happy in front of the TV?

Hadley Freeman



There is no best kind of parenting, but if it gets you and your kids safely through the day, then that's enough



‘I can honestly say some of my family’s happiest moments have been when we have watched TV together.’ Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

‘I can honestly say some of my family’s happiest moments have been when we have watched TV together.’ Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

Sat 3 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

This week, I happened to come across a particularly fascinating [Instagram](#) post from a member of that strange and relatively new breed of people known as “mumfluencers”, and it shows the aforementioned mumfluencer, dressed ever-so-casually but with mysteriously perfect makeup, marching through a forest with three small boys. Most intriguingly, she is holding a letter board on which she has spelled out: “Into the woods we go because kids won’t remember their best day of television.”

I have a lot of questions about this photo, which has gone heavily viral in the US, and the first one is this: did she carry that letter board the whole time she was in the woods? Because that surely would have become a bit tiresome. Also, are those actually her kids? That has been the public’s assumption, but I also have three small children, and let me tell you, no way would the mother of those kids have the time or inclination to put on lipstick in the morning. Also, maybe I’ve watched too many horror films of the [Midsommar](#) variety, but there is something about that photo that makes me

suspect she's taking those kids into the woods to make a human sacrifice. Aww, classic Instagram moment!

The craziest thing about that picture is the message. “Kids won’t remember their best day of television”? Has this person ever been a kid? I absolutely remember my best days of television, because television is bloody brilliant, especially when you’re a kid. Possibly the greatest afternoon of my entire childhood was when I watched the [episode of Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood](#) in which he goes to the crayon factory. I still watch it on YouTube in times of stress, the malleable coloured wax getting pushed through some metal holes and turning into crayons. People are very into [ASMR videos](#) these days, those clips of smoke blowing, or sap dripping, all of which are said to provoke a soothing sensory effect in viewers. But the greatest ASMR video ever is Mister Rogers at the crayon factory. Apparently we did, as a family, go on walks in the woods, because I’ve seen the photos. But I don’t remember any of that. I do, however, remember the Saturday afternoons when my sister and I would watch [Beverly Hills 90210](#), Baywatch, Blind Date and Gladiators. Now *that* was a great day of TV.

Of course, the message of this photo has nothing to do with television, and everything to do with parenting – and specifically, performative parenting. There’s been a lot of it about recently, especially during the lockdowns, when some parents needed to prove to everyone that they were not merely parenting in this difficult time, but parenting better than anyone ever has or will. (New linguistic rule: when a noun turns into a verb – eg, to friend, to parent – it becomes more about outward show than emotional connection.) Hence the rise in online photos of children snuggled up in a striped tent in the garden, or frolicking in a bluebell meadow, or lying on a bed with mummy, looking up at the camera. There’s nothing wrong with children doing any of those things – but are they inherently better than, let’s say, letting your kids watch TV? Mumfluencers say yes, 100%, but I’ll tell you what I’ve learned during my time as a lipstick-free, woods-avoiding mother: there’s a lot to be said for low-effort parenting.

Performative parents say: “Let’s all make a picnic and eat it in a nearby meadow!” Low-effort parents say: “I’ll defrost a pizza, then we’ll eat it in the kitchen.” Performative parents say: “Let’s have a scavenger hunt!” Low-effort parents say: “Let’s watch [Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure](#).” If you’re

the kind of parent who can do activities without getting in a foul mood, good for you. I am not, and my kids would rather do nothing and have a cheerful mother than a mother screaming about the impossibility of erecting a tent.

[I'm writing my memoir – does that make me just a character in a book? | Hadley Freeman](#)

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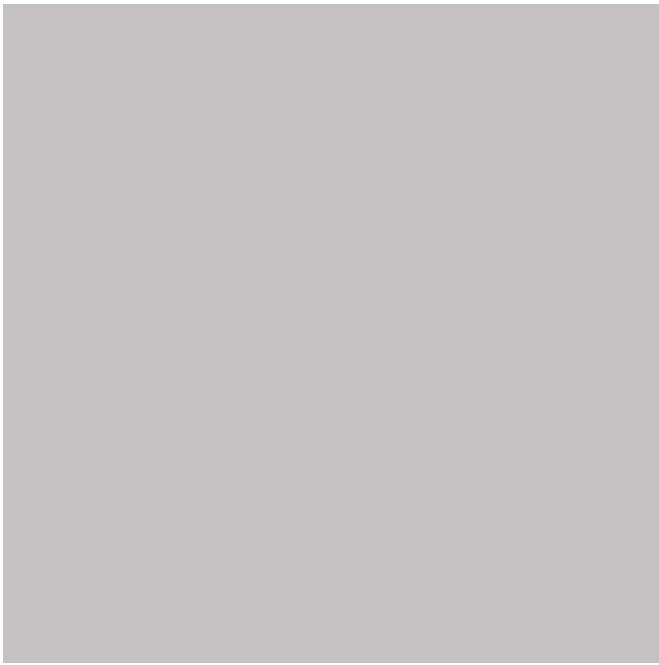
Low-effort parenting is occasionally confused with so-called slummy mummy parenting, that “Look at me, I’m a crap mum! My kids have no clean clothes! I love gin!” shtick, which is really just performative parenting approached from a different, even more annoying angle. Low-effort parents, by contrast, don’t have the energy for that kind of drama.

I love low-effort parenting, but I am not saying it is objectively the best parenting, because contrary to what lots of parenting books and influencers claim, there is no best kind. There is just parenting that gets you and your kids safely through the day without you putting anyone in the bin. Not every moment of parenting is An Experience, but I can honestly say some of my family’s happiest moments have been when we have watched TV together: everyone enjoying themselves, all of us talking about our favourite moments afterwards, no dread about the journey home – because we are home! True, it may not get me many likes on [Instagram](#), but at least I don’t have to hold up a letter board.

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Ethiopia

Over 400,000 people in Ethiopia's Tigray now in famine, UN warns

Another 1.8 million people are on the brink, officials say, and 33,000 children are severely malnourished



More than 400,000 people in Ethiopia's Tigray are in famine, the UN says, with another 1.8 million on the brink. Photograph: Ben Curtis/AP

More than 400,000 people in Ethiopia's Tigray are in famine, the UN says, with another 1.8 million on the brink. Photograph: Ben Curtis/AP

Reuters

Fri 2 Jul 2021 20.14 EDT

Top UN officials have warned the Security Council that more than 400,000 people in Ethiopia's Tigray are now in famine and that there was a risk of more clashes in the region [despite a unilateral ceasefire](#) by the federal government.

After six private discussions on Friday, the Security Council held its first public meeting since [fighting broke out in November](#) between government forces, backed by troops from neighbouring Eritrea, and TPLF fighters with Tigray's former ruling party.

[The looming famine in Tigray is an avoidable catastrophe](#)

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Acting UN aid chief Ramesh Rajasingham told the council that the [humanitarian situation in Tigray](#) had “worsened dramatically” in recent weeks with an increase of 50,000 in the number of people now suffering famine.

“More than 400,000 people are estimated to have crossed the threshold into famine and another 1.8 million people are on the brink of famine. Some are suggesting that the numbers are even higher. Thirty-three thousand children are severely malnourished,” he said.

The Ethiopian government [declared a unilateral ceasefire on Monday](#), which the TPLF dismissed as a joke. There are reports of continued clashes in some places as pressure builds internationally for all sides to pull back.

The US ambassador to the [United Nations](#), Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said Ethiopia’s government must demonstrate “it truly intends to use the ceasefire to address the humanitarian catastrophe,” warning that any denial of aid access is “not an indication of a humanitarian ceasefire, but of a siege.”

Ethiopia’s UN ambassador, Taye Atske Selassie Amde, told reporters after he addressed the council that the purpose of the ceasefire “is not to make a siege, it is to save lives.”

Amde questioned the need for the public Security Council meeting, telling the body the ceasefire was declared to improve aid access and “should have encouraged our friends to give support and de-escalate the unhelpful pressure.” He said the government hoped the ceasefire could also spark dialogue.

Thomas-Greenfield urged the parties to the conflict to “seize this moment,” warning that if they failed there could be devastating consequences for Ethiopia and the Horn of [Africa](#).

[Scores killed in Ethiopian airstrike on Tigray market](#)

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UN political and peacebuilding affairs chief Rosemary DiCarlo said Eritrean forces had withdrawn to areas adjacent to the border and that forces from the neighbouring region of Amhara remained in areas of western Tigray that they had seized.

“In short, there is potential for more confrontations and a swift deterioration in the security situation, which is extremely concerning,” she told the council, urging the TPLF to endorse the ceasefire and for Eritrean troops to fully withdraw.

While Russia and China did not object to Friday’s public meeting of the Security Council on Tigray, they made clear that they believed the conflict is an internal affair for Ethiopia. Russia’s UN Ambassador said: “We believe that interference by the Security Council in solving it is counterproductive.”

Russia and China are both council veto-powers, along with the United States, France and Britain.

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Mexico

‘Eye of fire’: Gas leak sparks huge blaze on ocean surface off Mexico

Flames that raged near a Pemex oil platform took more than five hours to extinguish



A fire on the surface of the ocean in Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula sparked by a gas leak from an underwater pipeline. Photograph: Manuel López San Martín/Twitter

A fire on the surface of the ocean in Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula sparked by a gas leak from an underwater pipeline. Photograph: Manuel López San Martín/Twitter

Reuters

Fri 2 Jul 2021 21.03 EDT

A fire on the ocean surface west of Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula has been extinguished, state oil company Pemex said, blaming a gas leak from an underwater pipeline for sparking the blaze captured in videos that went viral.

Bright orange flames jumping out of water resembling molten lava was dubbed an “eye of fire” on social media due to the blaze’s circular shape, as it raged a short distance from a Pemex oil platform early on Friday.

The fire took more than five hours to fully put out, according to Pemex. It began in an underwater pipeline that connects to a platform at Pemex’s flagship Ku Maloob Zaap oil development, the company’s most important, four sources told Reuters earlier.

WATCH: Flames shooting from the Gulf of Mexico after gas leak causes pipeline to catch fire pic.twitter.com/4LNOAY8w7I

— BNO News (@BNONews) [July 2, 2021](#)

Ku Maloob Zaap is located near from the southern rim of the Gulf of [Mexico](#).

Pemex said no injuries were reported, and production from the project was not affected after the gas leak ignited about 5:15am local time. It was completely extinguished by 10:30am.

[The scientists hired by big oil who predicted the climate crisis long ago](#)
[Read more](#)

The company added it would investigate the cause of the fire.

Pemex, which has a long record of major industrial accidents at its facilities, added it also shut the valves of the 12-inch-diameter pipeline.

Angel Carrizales, head of [Mexico](#)’s oil safety regulator ASEA, wrote on Twitter that the incident “did not generate any spill.” He did not explain what was burning on the water’s surface.

Ku Maloob Zaap is Pemex’s biggest crude oil producer, accounting for more than 40% of its nearly 1.7m barrels of daily output.

“The turbomachinery of Ku Maloob Zaap’s active production facilities were affected by an electrical storm and heavy rains,” according to a Pemex

incident report shared by one of Reuters' sources.

Company workers used nitrogen to control the fire, the report added.

Details from the incident report were not mentioned in Pemex's brief press statement and the company did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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Canada

Record heatwave may have killed 500 people in western Canada

British Columbia reports jump in number of ‘sudden and unexpected deaths’ and links them to extreme weather



A person enters the Hillcrest Community Centre where they can cool off, during the extreme hot weather in Vancouver on 30 June. Photograph: Don Mackinnon/AFP/Getty Images

A person enters the Hillcrest Community Centre where they can cool off, during the extreme hot weather in Vancouver on 30 June. Photograph: Don Mackinnon/AFP/Getty Images

Leyland Cecco in Toronto

Fri 2 Jul 2021 20.01 EDT

Nearly 500 people may have been killed by [record-breaking temperatures](#) in Canada’s westernmost province, as officials warn the grim toll from “heat dome” could rise again as more deaths are reported.

On Friday, British Columbia's chief coroner said that 719 "sudden and unexpected deaths" had been reported over the past week – triple the number during a similar period in a typical year.

"We are releasing this information as it is believed likely the extreme weather BC has experienced in the past week is a significant contributing factor to the increased number of deaths," the chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, said in a statement.

The coroner's office said it would typically expect close to 230 deaths in a similar period.

[Deadly British Columbia heatwave sows wildfires across Canada's west](#)
[Read more](#)

The overall total will probably rise after more communities provide data, but Lapointe said the province has seen a promising downward trend in recent days as the heat ebbs and shifts eastward.

Officials have cautioned it will probably take months to determine the exact cause of death for hundreds of residents, but they say heat played a significant role in the surge in fatalities, especially among seniors in the province.

"Many of the deaths experienced over the past week were among older individuals living alone in private residences with minimal ventilation," Lapointe said in her statement.

In a region of the country accustomed to mild summer temperatures, communities were forced to scramble to find ways to help vulnerable residents stay safe amid blistering temperatures.

But regional officials are facing growing questions over their response to the crisis.

On Thursday, the head of the province's emergency health service apologized after residents were made to wait hours for ambulances during the worst of the heatwave.

Global News reported that British Columbia's emergency services centre – which allows paramedics to be redeployed to high need areas – wasn't activated until after the worst of the heatwave had passed.

The weather system that enveloped large swaths of the Pacific north-west broke 103 heat records across British Columbia, Alberta, Yukon and Northwest Territories earlier this week, according to Environment [Canada](#).

The heat has done little to help a province [already vulnerable to the devastating effects of wildfires](#).

At least two people are believed to have died in a wildfire [that destroyed the village of Lytton on Wednesday](#). Police attempted to search for missing residents, but dangerous conditions have prevented them from entering the community.

Late on Friday, 136 active wildfires were reported in British Columbia, including nine which were “of concern”, according to officials. The dry, hot weather is expected to continue for the next week, hampering efforts to gain control over the fires.

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[Canada](#)

Deadly British Columbia heatwave sows wildfires across Canada's west

Residents recovering from record-breaking temperatures face a new threat, with more than 100 fires burning



A motorist watches from a pullout on the Trans-Canada Highway as a wildfire burns on the side of a mountain in Lytton, British Columbia, on Thursday. Photograph: Darryl Dyck/AP

A motorist watches from a pullout on the Trans-Canada Highway as a wildfire burns on the side of a mountain in Lytton, British Columbia, on Thursday. Photograph: Darryl Dyck/AP

[Jesse Winter](#) in Vancouver

Fri 2 Jul 2021 13.25 EDT

On the heels of an unprecedented heatwave that left hundreds dead in British Columbia, [Canada](#)'s westernmost province is now battling a fresh threat.

More than 100 wildfires are burning across the province, as of late on Thursday, 86 of which started in the past two days. Evacuation orders and alerts have gone out in a dozen communities. The province's premier, John Horgan, suggested that the crisis could become dire enough to see the Canadian military deployed.

[Canadian inferno: northern heat exceeds worst-case climate models](#)

[Read more](#)

There was a similar picture in the US west. Hundreds of firefighters battled in high heat against several wildfires in the forests of far northern [California](#), where the flames have already forced many communities to evacuate.

Mount Shasta, the volcano that towers over the region, was shrouded on Thursday in a haze of smoke plumes so huge they could easily be seen in images from weather satellites in space.

In British Columbia, it was supposed to be a week of tentative celebration – Thursday was the day that the province's Covid-19 state of emergency was lifted. But now the province is likely to be facing a new state of emergency over the wildfires.

“Absolutely, we may well, depending on how the fire season starts to unfold require a provincial state of emergency such as we have seen in our past five seasons in this province,” the province's public safety minister, Mike Farnworth, said.

In the tiny village of Lytton, [where a wildfire struck with such fury that residents had mere minutes to evacuate](#), an unknown number of residents were still unaccounted for on Friday. Community Facebook groups were brimming with posts by residents desperate to track down their missing loved ones.

The Vancouver Sun reported [at least two people died](#) attempting to shelter in a hole in the ground as the fire raged.

In the days leading up to the fire itself, Lytton set national heat records for three days straight until Tuesday, when the mercury reached a hellish 49.5C

(121.1F), baking virtually all moisture from the region.

Horgan said “anecdotal” reports suggested the fire may have been ignited by an errant spark cast by a freight train into tinder-dry grass near the town. However, he cautioned that a formal investigation would be needed to determine the precise cause.

[‘Lyttion is gone’: wildfire tears through village after record-breaking heat](#)

[Read more](#)

The Lytton inferno and the heatwave that preceded it are the result of a so-called “heat dome” – a weather phenomenon where a ridge of high pressure traps and compresses warm air, driving up temperatures and baking the region. While not unheard of, climate scientists say heat domes like this will become more common and more intense because of climate change.

British Columbia’s chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, said her office received reports of at least 486 “[sudden and unexpected deaths](#)” between June 25 and Wednesday. Normally, she said about 165 people would die in the province over a five-day period.

Thanks to British Colombia’s usually moderate climate, many homes do not have air conditioning. When thermometers soared, those who could escaped to the beaches and ice-cold mountain creeks nearby to seek relief.

Many of those who couldn’t were forced indoors, seeking shelter in city-run cooling stations, at sprinklers and water misters set up around town, even resorting to sleeping in wet T-shirts.

In downtown Vancouver, many of the city’s most marginalised communities have borne the brunt of the heatwave’s wrath in sweltering single-room-occupancy hotels and other social housing, or gathering in alleys and doorways, seeking any shade they could find.

Community activist Angel Gates said that while she had her own air conditioning unit to keep her and her friends cool, most of the building did not. “It was just so hot,” she said. “There were ambulances coming all the time.”

At Vancouver's Overdose Prevention Society, a supervised drug consumption site in the city's downtown core, manager Trey Helton said workers went through 14 cases of bottled water in a three-hour period. "We had a lot of people passing out from heat exhaustion, trying to get them into the shade and basically just a lot of 911 calls," Helton said.

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