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More than 1m children from key worker families living in poverty, says TUC

Study finds more than one in five children of workers employed in the frontline of the pandemic live below breadline



The study found that almost one in three children of key workers lived below the poverty line in the worst-affected region, the north-east of England. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

The study found that almost one in three children of key workers lived below the poverty line in the worst-affected region, the north-east of England. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

[Larry Elliott](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

More than a million children from households in the frontline of the fight against the coronavirus pandemic are living in poverty, according to new research published by the [TUC](#).

The study found that one in five children of key workers in England, Scotland and Wales were living below the official breadline – rising to almost one in three in the worst-affected region, the north-east.

The TUC said low pay and insecure hours – widespread in occupations such as social care, supermarkets and delivery drivers – were the main reasons for in-work poverty among key workers.

Frances O'Grady, the TUC's general secretary, said: “Every key worker deserves a decent standard of living for their family. But too often their hard work is not paying off like it should. And they struggle to keep up with the basic costs of family life.

“The prime minister has promised to ‘build back fairer’. He should start with our key workers. They put themselves in harm’s way to keep the country going through the pandemic. Now, we must be there for them too.

“This isn’t just about doing the right thing by key workers. If we put more money in the pockets of working families, their spending will help our businesses and high streets recover. It’s the fuel in the tank that our economy needs.”

The report, prepared for the TUC by the consultancy Landman Economics and using the government definition of key workers, found that 29% of the children of key-worker households in the north-east were living in poverty, followed by London (27%), the West Midlands (25%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (25%). The lowest rates were in the east of England (15.5%) and the south-west (15.6%).

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The TUC said that as well as pay and hours, high housing costs were reducing the amount of money key worker households could spend on groceries and utility bills. Support through universal credit, due to be cut by £20 a week in the autumn after a temporary pandemic uplift, was not enough to guarantee that families avoid poverty.

Current government policies were likely to increase child poverty rates, because as well as cutting universal credit ministers had capped pay rises for key workers in the public sectors, leading in some cases to cuts in wages when adjusted for inflation.

The TUC said these policies would put brakes on Britain's recovery, because curbs on household spending would restrain business activity and have knock-on effects on wage growth for other workers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2021/jul/14/more-than-1m-children-from-key-worker-families-living-in-poverty-says-tuc>

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Tory MP says party must change attitude towards taking the knee

Exclusive: Steve Baker says ‘this may be a decisive moment for our party’ amid backlash over abuse of footballers



Players take the knee before the Euro 2020 final. Photograph: John Sibley/Getty Images

Players take the knee before the Euro 2020 final. Photograph: John Sibley/Getty Images

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 15.02 EDT

Conservatives urgently need to change their attitudes towards people taking the knee, an influential Tory MP has said amid an angry backlash against the government over the racist abuse of England footballers.

Steve Baker, the former minister and hard Brexit campaigner, broke cover on Tuesday to plead for his party to think again about dismissive attitudes towards the taking of the knee and calling for better understanding of the motives behind it.

Labour has been granted an urgent question in parliament on Wednesday on racism on social media after the abuse faced by players following the Euro 2020 final, and Baker said: “This may be a decisive moment for our party.”

“Much as we can’t be associated with calls to defund the police, we urgently need to challenge our own attitude to people taking a knee,” Baker wrote in a message to MPs on the Conservatives Against Racism, For Equality group. “I fear we are in danger of misrepresenting our own heart for those who suffer injustice.”

[Johnson and Patel accused of hypocrisy over racist abuse of England footballers](#)

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His intervention came after the England footballer Tyrone Mings [accused the home secretary](#), Priti Patel, of “stoking the fire” at the beginning of the tournament when she described players taking the knee as “gesture politics” and refused to condemn booing by fans.

A No 10 reception to honour the Euro 2020 campaign is understood to be unlikely to proceed, with no plans yet in place to celebrate the team. Johnson’s spokesperson said on Tuesday that discussions were ongoing with the Football Association about the best way to honour the team, but refused to say if there would be an imminent meeting between them and the prime minister.

One source told the Guardian that Gareth Southgate’s squad had originally been due to be hosted by Boris Johnson at a reception in Downing Street on

Monday – . But a No 10 spokesperson said the FA had not wanted an immediate event if the team lost.

“The PM would have been delighted and honoured to host a reception for the [England](#) squad to mark their outstanding performance in the European championship,” the spokesperson said. “However, No 10 was informed prior to Sunday’s game that the FA’s preference was not for an immediate reception in the event [England](#) were to lose. We continue to discuss suitable ways for the PM to thank the squad and coaching staff for their heroic efforts throughout the tournament.”

Albie Amankona, a co-founder of Conservatives Against Racism, For Equality, wrote to all Conservative MPs on Tuesday night urging more compassion, and his letter was forwarded to the group by Baker.

“As a young man who is as proud of being a Conservative as he is of his African and English heritage, I have been disappointed at the way our side of the house has engaged with how our national football team decided to stand against racism by taking the knee,” Amankona wrote. “Too many of us have fundamentally misunderstood the gesture of taking the knee, and we have not listened when those who support the gesture have explained why.”

Amankona said his sister had been in central London and “felt threatened and unsafe at the racial nature of the reaction of some England fans to our defeat. I fear that the way some of us have spoken out against taking the knee laid the foundations for the actions of some England fans after the football game both on social media and in real life and I bitterly regret this.”

Concern is growing among some Conservative advisers and MPs that the strategy of pivoting towards the culture wars may be toxic for the party. One senior Tory MP called the situation “embarrassing” and highlighted the Conservative MP [Lee Anderson](#) who said he would not watch the team because they took the knee. “It was absolutely tragic, it’s a laughing stock,” they said.

Another senior Tory said: “I think there needs to be a serious realisation soon in government that people simply don’t care about the culture war crap.

They care about the cost of living, NHS and crime. They don't want to see us starting fights with Marcus Rashford.”

The former Conservative minister Johnny Mercer tweeted support for Mings after his criticism of Patel, saying: “The painful truth is that this guy is completely right.”

Mercer said more of his Conservative colleagues should speak out. “We have some great colleagues in the party who reflect this – I am in no way alone. But more must have the courage to speak up, instead of remaining silent in some weird attempt to curry favour.”

Writing for PoliticsHome, Mercer said: “As leaders do we not support them; do we not see their pain, do we not see their efforts in the bigger picture? That’s why the home secretary was wrong to side with those booing the players before matches, and why the prime minister was absolutely right to ask them to stop.”

Labour has called on the government to use the upcoming online safety bill to give courts the power to ban anyone convicted of racist abuse online from attending football matches.

Currently, football banning orders do not cover offences that take place online and only apply to racism shouted from the terraces. The shadow culture secretary, Jo Stevens, said: “The racists who have been abusing England players online should be banned from football grounds. They do not deserve to be anywhere near a game of football.”

Johnson summoned tech companies to Downing Street on Tuesday to ask them to hand over details of those who posted racist content online to the police.

His official spokesperson said Johnson would “reiterate the urgent need for action ahead of tougher laws coming into force in the online harms bill”, and said there was “no question that abuse was upsetting, unfair and must be stamped out”.

A Twitter spokesperson said the platform had had a “constructive conversation” with Johnson.

Asked whether No 10 agreed with a government source who said the perpetrators should have their details handed over so that they could be made an example of, they said: “Yes, we expect social media companies to do everything they can to identify these people.

“The police already have a range of powers to identify and pursue those who use anonymity to spread hatred, but we have committed to strengthening the criminal law in this area.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jul/13/leading-tory-mp-says-party-must-change-attitude-on-taking-the-knee>

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Race

Petition for lifetime ban from football matches for racists nears 1m signatures

Fans' proposal follows abuse online and offline aimed at England players after defeat in Euros



Crowds gather at a mural of Marcus Rashford in Withington. The portrait had been defaced with racist graffiti after the Euro 2020 final. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Crowds gather at a mural of Marcus Rashford in Withington. The portrait had been defaced with racist graffiti after the Euro 2020 final. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

PA Media

Tue 13 Jul 2021 19.27 EDT

A [petition](#) to permanently ban racists from football matches has reached almost 1m signatures in just 24 hours.

Football fans Shaista Aziz, Amna Abdullatif and Huda Jawad created the petition on Monday in response to [racist abuse aimed at England footballers](#) Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka and Jadon Sancho after the Three Lions' Euro 2020 final defeat.

It calls for the Football Association and government to work together to ban "all those who have carried out racist abuse, [online](#) or offline, from all football matches in England for life".

[Manchester shows support for Marcus Rashford: ‘It’s evolved into something special’](#)

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The campaigners have since seen their petition go viral – garnering more than 970,000 signatures by Tuesday evening.

“To go over 1m we feel validated in our resistance to racism and that what we have been able to articulate is the sentiment that is held nationwide,” said Jawad, a feminist and anti-racism activist.

Abdullatif added: “I hope [the petition’s success is] like a hug to these players to say that we really care about you, you’ve made us really proud.”

The three women know each other through activism but are all avid football fans and met up for the first time since the UK’s coronavirus lockdown to watch [England](#) face Ukraine earlier this month.

All three said they have experienced being made to feel unwelcome while watching football as a result of their race and gender.

“When I would go and see England play in Wembley, I remember very vividly being terrified,” said Aziz, a journalist and Labour councillor. “I remember one particular match, I actually went to the steward at half-time and begged him, ‘Please, can you let me sit with the opposition?’

[Why England’s footballers are so determined to keep taking the knee - podcast](#)

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“I’m born and raised in this country, I’m from this country, I support England, but felt that I needed to get out of the English half.”

The temperament of Gareth Southgate’s England team had given the three fans encouragement that football was moving forward.

“The squad has shown us something else ... a completely inspiring vision of what young people can achieve, what a diverse group of people can achieve

and what young men can be,” said Abdullatif. “They don’t have to be misogynistic, they don’t have to be racist.

“This is all on us, we all have a role to play, we can all make a difference ... if you don’t make that change, nothing will change for the greater good.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/14/petition-to-ban-racists-from-football-matches-for-ever-nears-1m-signatures>

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UK ministers resist calls to reduce VAT on green home improvements

MPs and builders want tax cut included in government strategy to cut emissions from home heating



In October 2019, VAT on the installation of many solar panels increased from 5% to 20%. Photograph: Anatoliy Gleb/Getty Images/iStockphoto

In October 2019, VAT on the installation of many solar panels increased from 5% to 20%. Photograph: Anatoliy Gleb/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Fiona Harvey Environment correspondent

Wed 14 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Ministers are resisting calls to reduce VAT on green home improvements, despite pleas from MPs and [builders](#), as they prepare to set out a national strategy for cutting greenhouse gas emissions from home heating.

Heating Britain's homes accounts for about 14% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, and that number has barely budged in the past decade. This year, ministers [scrapped the green homes grant](#), a scheme to subsidise insulation

and low-carbon heating systems, after only six months. This left the UK with no plan to bring homes into line with the government's commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

The Department for Business, [Energy](#) and Industrial Strategy has been preparing a new heat and buildings policy to solve the problem, which may finally be published this week. However, the Treasury seems intent on leaving out a key plank of the strategy that has the support of MPs, the construction industry, green experts and campaigners.

In a letter seen by the Guardian, in response to a request to consider VAT cuts for green home improvements, the Treasury minister Jesse Norman wrote last month: "The government has no plans to change the VAT treatment of energy-saving materials at this time."

Norman argued: "I have some concerns that the intended behavioural changes [following a cut in VAT on green home improvements] would not be borne out in practice. For example, even if heat pumps were zero-rated for VAT, this would still not bridge the price gap with gas boilers, meaning uptake would still be low. That being the case, alternative ways in which to encourage the use of heat pumps are more appropriate."

Adrian Ramsay, the chief executive of the MCS Charitable Foundation, to which the letter was sent, said many people were put off making such improvements by the additional cost of VAT.

In October 2019, the government [increased the VAT rate from 5% to 20%](#) on installations of a range of low-carbon goods including many solar panels – especially those with batteries – as well as domestic wind turbine systems, heat pumps and insulation materials. The higher rate is charged where the price of materials exceeds 60% of the installation cost, with exemptions for some cases of social need, such as care homes.

Householders who want to refurbish their homes to a green standard are also faced with 20% VAT on the cost of doing so, while new construction is zero-rated for VAT. For instance, in one case cited by MCS, the refurbishment of former Ministry of Defence accommodation in East Meon, Hampshire –

which was turned into an eco-tourism site – cost £1.2m, of which £200,000 was VAT.

Ramsay, whose charity promotes the take-up of low-carbon technologies, said: “The government is wanting to encourage everyone to install energy efficiency measures, refurbish their homes and change heating systems to zero-carbon options such as heat pumps, but has the affront to charge up to 20% VAT to make a home energy efficient.

“The current rate of 20% VAT on refurbishment costs for an eco-project shows how the tax system is working against the retrofitting agenda and actively encouraging developers and others towards the ‘knock down and rebuild’ route, which has a 0% VAT rate [but] releases embodied carbon, rather than saving it.”

An influential select committee of MPs also called [for VAT on green home improvements to be cut](#) in February.

The heat and buildings strategy is expected to address the stubborn problem of [moving people away from gas boilers and on to heat pumps](#), and insulating the UK’s draughty housing stock. The last decade has seen the government largely fail to make any dent in the UK’s high emissions from homes.

The problem has been added to by ministers’ refusal to bring forward more stringent building standards for new-build homes. This means that 1m new homes built in recent years also require refurbishment, at a [higher cost to homeowners](#) than the cost to developers of building them to a green standard in the first place.

Ed Matthew, the campaigns director of the thinktank E3G, said the government must take a series of measures to make Britain’s homes greener, including introducing a new insulation programme, tax breaks such as stamp duty relief for green homes, and green mortgages.

He said: “To get on track to net zero we need to retrofit an average of 1m homes a year, replacing gas boilers and insulating the walls, floors and roofs. The only way to make this happen is to roll out a major green homes

infrastructure programme and provide generous grants and tax breaks, to make it affordable for everyone. Investing in green homes is the single most effective action the Treasury can take to level up, cut our emissions, boost the UK economy and create jobs in every corner of the UK.”

A government spokesperson said: “The UK is leading the way in fighting climate change. We are supporting lower income households to make the transition to net zero – as a result of government policy, energy bills are lower today than they were in 2010. As we transition away from fossil fuel boilers to more efficient alternatives, which can lower energy costs overall, we will use targeted measures to incentivise the switch.”

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Ban on polluting lorries pledged in Tories' transport greenprint

Delayed decarbonisation plan for achieving net zero emissions for transport by 2050 is published



An accident on the M25 motorway, England, gridlocks lorries adding to pollution from vehicle fumes. Photograph: Justin Kase/Alamy

An accident on the M25 motorway, England, gridlocks lorries adding to pollution from vehicle fumes. Photograph: Justin Kase/Alamy

Gwyn Topham Transport correspondent

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Tue 13 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

New diesel and petrol lorries will be banned in Britain by 2040, under a “greenprint” to decarbonise all types of transport by 2050.

The British government’s long-awaited transport decarbonisation plan, finally published on 14 July, will include what is being billed as a “world-

leading pledge” to end the sale of all new polluting vehicles and move towards net zero domestic aviation emissions by 2040.

It will also include commitments to electrify the entire fleet of government cars and vans by 2027, and plans to create a net zero-emissions rail network by 2050.

While the government said the [plans](#) were still subject to consultation, it said it proposed to phase out all polluting HGVs by 2040, and polluting lorries weighing under 26 tonnes by 2035. It would do so earlier if a faster transition seemed feasible.

Hauliers said the plans were unrealistic and could add huge costs to the struggling industry. Rod McKenzie, of the Road Haulage Association, said he supported the goal, but added: “These alternative HGVs don’t yet exist, we don’t know when they will and it’s not clear what any transition will look like. So this is a blue skies aspiration ahead of real life reality. For many haulage companies there are fears around cost of new vehicles and a collapse in resale value of existing lorries.”

However, Elizabeth de Jong, director of policy at Logistics UK, said the plan, with consultation, would “help to provide logistics businesses with confidence and clarity on the steps they must take on the pathway to net zero”.

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, said it was a “credible pathway” for the transport sector to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and to support highly skilled jobs and cleaner air. “The transport decarbonisation plan is just the start. We will need continued efforts and collaboration to deliver its ambitious commitments, which will ultimately create sustainable economic growth through healthier communities as we build back greener,” he said.

Campaign groups endorsed the plan. Greg Archer, UK director of the NGO [Transport & Environment](#), said it was a milestone in the move to a more sustainable system. “The decision to only use zero-emission road vehicles, including trucks, by 2050 is world leading and will significantly reduce Britain’s climate impact and improve the air we breathe. This complements

the goal of net zero internal UK flights by 2040, although there is much more to do to tackle international aviation emissions.”

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UK public should get ‘people’s dividend’ in drive to hit green targets

Landmark report proposes free public transport, more green spaces and cash for home improvements



Caroline Lucas is one of the co-chairs of the cross-party environmental justice commission. Photograph: PA Video/PA

Caroline Lucas is one of the co-chairs of the cross-party environmental justice commission. Photograph: PA Video/PA

[Jonathan Watts](#)

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Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

The British public should be given a “people’s dividend” worth billions of pounds as part of the national drive to hit targets for net zero carbon emissions and the restoration of nature, according to the most detailed blueprint to date for a green transition.

Free public transport, more green spaces and money for improving homes are at the core of a landmark report that proposes one of the greatest advances in the fairness agenda since the creation of the NHS.

The 70,000-word manifesto by the cross-party environmental justice commission says levelling up must be at the heart of efforts to decarbonise the UK economy to ensure policies have broad public support.

The authors – MPs, citizen's juries, business executives, union leaders and members of the Institute for Public Policy Research – say they have learned from the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vest) protests in France that fuel tax increases will bring a backlash if they are perceived as unfair. Instead, they cite Canada as an example of redistributing carbon tax revenues among citizens. In the UK's case, they say this should be done in the form of grants and support for better wellbeing.

Caroline Lucas, a Green party MP and one of the co-chairs of the commission, saw parallels with the creation of the NHS in terms of the possible social impact.

"In terms of breadth, I don't think we have seen anything that goes right across the board like this. Fairness is not an optional extra but driving the proposals. That is what makes this different," she said. "The NHS came out of the devastation of the second world war, when we learned what truly mattered was health. In the same way, this [green transition plan] can be a positive legacy as we come out of the worst of the Covid pandemic. The pandemic showed what governments can do when they choose to and have a collective view of risk. They have housed the homeless and put public health and wellbeing – briefly at least – above profit and GDP. One of the learnings from Covid is that governments can do big stuff."

After 18 months of deliberation by policymakers and citizens across areas of the UK likely to be most affected by the transition – Tees Valley and County Durham Aberdeenshire, south Wales Valleys and Thurrock in Essex – the final report says the UK is currently failing to ensure that the costs and benefits of the transition to net zero will be fairly shared.

To address this, the authors propose a series of policies that would ensure this fundamental change in the country's economic model and, they say, will improve people's everyday lives.

Among the highlights are:

- Adding £30bn of public investment each year in a low carbon economy until at least 2030.
- A new £7.5bn-a-year “GreenGO scheme”, which would serve as a financial one-stop shop, akin to the government’s Help to Buy scheme, to help households switch to green alternatives on heating, home insulation and transport.
- Upgrade local public transport and making it free to all users throughout the UK by 2030, with free bus travel by 2025 as a first step.
- Introducing a “3 x 30 x 300” rule for local planning that would ensure at least three natural features are visible from every new home, every neighbourhood has at least 30% tree canopy cover, and no new home is further than 300 metres from an accessible green space.
- Offering workers in high-carbon industries, such as oil and gas, the right to retrain for new low-carbon jobs, while supporting businesses to make the transition.
- Establish a permanent, UK-wide climate and nature assembly, alongside a “wellbeing of future generations” act in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Wales already has this) to ensure that all business and policy decisions must take account of their long-term effects.
- Involve communities so policies reflect local priorities. This would include granting local authorities new powers over economic strategy and giving the public a direct say over how local budgets are spent.

The authors said they had been inspired by their discussions with citizen juries. “What I’d highlight is this report’s optimism. Every time we do a policy, we should ask what is the payback to citizens – whether better health,

longer term lower energy bills, or more sustainable diets” said Laura Sandys, another co-chair and former Conservative MP for South Thanet.

Funding for the plan would come from carbon taxes and borrowing at the currently low interest rates, said the authors. Hilary Benn, another co-chair, Labour MP for Leeds Central and a former environment secretary, said the costs of inaction would be far greater as the devastating heatwaves in western Canada and the US have shown. He emphasised the benefits, including the job creation potential of upgrading public transport and replacing gas-fired home boilers.

“The climate and nature crisis are even bigger than the pandemic. We will need the same sort of leadership from the government,” he said. “This is not just a difficult transition that will bring pain. We know what the aim is. The question is how to do it and take people with us so we end up with a better country. That is what we have tried to answer in this report.”

Luke Murphy, head of the environmental justice commission, said the key now is urgency. “The debate is no longer just about targets, but how to deliver,” he said. “The biggest gap is the policy gap. The next 10 years are absolutely crucial. If we invest now, and introduce the right regulations and targets, this would send clear market signals and then the transition will accelerate. It is quite possible that we could get there sooner than 2050. But we need public support for that, which is why fairness must be central.”

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[Travel and transport](#)

Trains far greener but much more costly than planes, analysis finds

Passengers face ‘near impossible’ choice between low prices and climate-friendly travel, says Which?



EasyJet was criticised by green activists in June for launching a dozen new domestic UK routes. Photograph: PinPep/Rex/Shutterstock

EasyJet was criticised by green activists in June for launching a dozen new domestic UK routes. Photograph: PinPep/Rex/Shutterstock

Damian Carrington Environment editor

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Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Train fares on popular UK routes are 50% more expensive than plane fares despite rail journeys causing 80% lower carbon dioxide emissions, according to analysis by the consumer group Which?.

It said passengers face a “near impossible” choice between low ticket prices and climate-friendly travel. More people are taking holidays in the UK due

to coronavirus and airlines have launched dozens of new domestic routes.

The Which? study examined 10 routes within the UK and found that eight were cheaper by plane. The biggest price difference was from Birmingham to Newquay where the return plane fare was £67 and the train fare was £180.

The train fare from Bristol to Newcastle also cost more than double the air ticket. This route had the biggest difference in CO2 emissions, with the return plane journey resulting in 203kg of CO2 per person, compared with 33kg for the train.

“As the pandemic continues to cause uncertainty for international travel, many of us are taking holidays closer to home this year,” said Rory Boland, the travel editor at Which? “Travellers who choose to take the train face significantly higher fares and journey times, putting those who want to lessen their environmental impact at a disadvantage.”

Chart

The emissions of the aviation industry are coming under increasing scrutiny as the climate crisis worsens. The EU is expected this week to announce plans for a [levy on jet fuel](#), which unlike road fuels has not been liable for duty.

Campaigners have intensified calls for a [frequent-flyer tax in the UK](#), where only 15% of people take 70% of all flights. EasyJet was [criticised by green activists](#) in June for launching a dozen new domestic routes, including Birmingham to Newquay, which is less than 200 miles. Other campaigners have called for [taxes on “soaring” private jet use](#) to generate funds to invest in greener flying.

The UK aviation industry announced its [carbon targets](#) in June, but these allow [emissions from planes to increase into the mid-2030s](#). It says buying carbon offsets will result in overall emissions falling compared with 2019 levels.

The government proposed in March to [cut air passenger duty tax](#) on domestic flights at the same time [as increasing rail fares by 2.6%](#), more than

the rate of inflation. Ministers have yet to publish their climate strategy for aviation.

[1% of people cause half of global aviation emissions – study](#)

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The Which? analysis compared the costs of plane and train journeys between 5 and 8 August when booked at least a month in advance. Journeys from Bournemouth to Edinburgh and from Manchester to Newquay were significantly more expensive by train. The trip from London to Newquay was one of the two journeys out of the 10 assessed that was cheaper by train.

“There are steps that people can take to reduce the cost of travelling by train,” said Boland. “Take the time to compare dates and times to see if cheaper fares are available, and look into what railcards you might be eligible for to save up to a third on train travel. You may be able to make further savings by checking if split-ticketing is an option on your chosen route.”

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Coronavirus live: Netherlands cases rise by more than 500% after reopening; South Korea tightens curbs

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[Labour](#)

Voters still unlikely to trust Labour with spending, party warned

New pressure group urges party to focus on winning back voters in towns, with emphasis on work and good jobs



Stephen Kinnock said the party needed to reestablish trust on jobs and economic competence – and make them the main themes of the next few years. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

Stephen Kinnock said the party needed to reestablish trust on jobs and economic competence – and make them the main themes of the next few years. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

Jessica Elgot Deputy political editor
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Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Voters blame local [Labour](#) councils for austerity and see voting Conservative as a chance for change – and are still unlikely to trust [Labour](#) with spending – a new pressure group has cautioned.

The warnings come from a newly launched group Renaissance – led by key figures from Labour's centre including [Stephen Kinnock](#), Yvette Cooper and Justin Madders – who have called for the party to refocus on winning back Conservative voters in towns.

Kinnock, a shadow minister and MP for Aberavon, told the Guardian the victory in Batley and Spen was “a turning point for us … I genuinely feel we've got a spring in our step, but it needs to go further and it needs to go faster and it has to be scaled up.”

He said the party needed a compelling narrative for the next two years ahead of the election that it could hammer home. “We need to commit to stories. We need, I would say very soon, to be clear on these issues, and then to actually start repeating them and making them the first thing that Labour MPs and activists and supporters think about when they get up in the morning,” Kinnock said.

He said the party needed to reestablish trust on jobs and economic competence – and make them the main themes of the next few years, rather than be distracted by culture war traps laid by the Conservatives.

“The problem comes when – if you've got a lack of clarity about who we are and what we stand for – that is fertile territory for the Conservatives to plant the seeds of division,” he said.

“You need to fill that space with really strong and compelling stories about being a party of work and good jobs, being a party that wants a manufacturing renaissance, and being a party that's going to manage your hard-earned taxpayers' money in a very sensible and sound way that's actually going to invest for change in the future. Then these other issues and concerns and sideshows will just evaporate.”

The campaign has done a series of focus groups from former Labour voters in target seats across England and Wales, who have stopped voting Labour over the course of the past 10 years, but who say they are open to voting for Labour again.

The final report, due later in the summer, will warn that Labour's attacks on austerity were not having the desired effect because Conservatives were successfully devolving blame to local councils, often run by Labour.

One voter in their 50s, from Rother Valley, said local government “get the money from London to put in what they need, and they aren’t doing the job ... I have always voted Labour and now gone over to Conservative.”

Another from Stoke said that Labour “had the chance to prioritise Stoke for years and years. People then decide to vote for something different.”

Voters also suggested they were deeply concerned about the national debt and said they did not trust Labour with high-spending pledges. “It’s hard to trust Labour given that the pandemic will have to be paid back for some time,” one from Don Valley said.

However, Kinnock said the focus groups showed that a relentless focus on secure jobs could win over voters.

“I remember when Labour were in charge, the worker had more rights than the employer. I think we have gone too far now ... and the employer has too much power,” one voter said.

Launching the new group, which has financial backing from north-east lawyer Vaqas Farooq, the MPs warn more than 100 of Labour’s 124 target seats for the next general election lie outside the major cities.

Carolyn Harris, Starmer’s former PPS and one of the party leader’s key loyalists, is also on the advisory board, saying he “needs support from organisations within the Labour movement”.

Cooper, whose Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford seat has become a marginal after a sharp fall in Labour’s share of the vote, said that the image of Labour as “the party only for the big cities” had to change.

“Labour has lost support in many of the towns and communities where the party was forged over a century ago,” she said, saying she backed a renewed focus on “community values, on supporting families and on bringing quality jobs back to our towns”.

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People take the knee during a demonstration in support of England player Marcus Rashford that was vandalised after the Euro 2020 final. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Guardian morning briefing](#)

Wednesday briefing: Tories urged to rethink stance on taking a knee

People take the knee during a demonstration in support of England player Marcus Rashford that was vandalised after the Euro 2020 final. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Labour wants people convicted of racist abuse to be banned from football games ... outrage over foreign aid cuts ... and readers applaud the England team

by [Warren Murray](#)

Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.30 EDT

Top story: ‘People don’t care about culture war’

Hello, I’m Warren Murray and here’s where we are with everything.

Steve Baker, the former minister and hard Brexit campaigner, has called for Conservatives to urgently change their attitudes towards people taking the knee. “Much as we can’t be associated with calls to defund the police, we urgently need to challenge our own attitude to people taking a knee,” Baker wrote. “I fear we are in danger of misrepresenting our own heart for those who suffer injustice.” Another senior Tory said the government must realise “people simply don’t care about the culture war crap. They care about the cost of living, NHS and crime. [They don’t want to see us starting fights with Marcus Rashford.](#)”

Labour has called on the government to use the upcoming online safety bill to give courts the power to ban anyone convicted of racist abuse online from attending football matches – an idea that has so far attracted [nearly 1m signatures to an online petition](#). Keir Starmer’s party has been granted an urgent question in parliament on Wednesday on racism on social media after the abuse faced by players following the Euro 2020 final. Boris Johnson has asked tech companies to hand over details of [those who posted racist content online to the police](#).

‘Miserable and destitute’ – Downing Street has been accused from both within and outside its own ranks of putting tens of thousands of lives at risk

in some of the world's poorest nations after Conservative MPs voted to [cut billions of pounds in foreign aid for years to come](#). The former PM Sir John Major said: "It seems that we can afford a 'national yacht' that no one either wants or needs, whilst cutting help to some of the most miserable and destitute people in the world." Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, appeased Tory rebels by striking a compromise that the cut would be temporary until the public finances have improved. But critics say it might not be reversed for more than five years under such conditions. The government won the vote in the House of Commons by 333 to 298. Those opposing the move included 25 Conservative MPs, as well as Labour, the Lib Dems and the SNP.

Midweek catch-up

- > A [drunken Rudy Giuliani urged Donald Trump to “just say we won”](#) on election night, according to a new book. The actual winner, Joe Biden, has meanwhile blasted Republicans – [“Have you no shame?”](#) – for their efforts to disenfranchise black voters.
 - > An Iranian intelligence officer and three alleged operatives have been charged with conspiring to kidnap back to Iran a [New York-based journalist who criticised the Tehran regime](#). US authorities say people in the UK and Canada were also targets.
 - > The number of women in senior roles at FTSE 350 companies will [lag behind men until 2036](#) as the pandemic adds four years to the wait for parity in the boardroom, according to a new report.
 - > The chief of MI5, Ken McCallum, is to warn that the activities of China, Russia and other hostile states could be [as bad for the UK as terrorism](#). He will emphasise that Chinese theft of British research and discoveries could “short-circuit years of patient British research or investment. This is happening at scale. And it affects us all.”
 - > Italy has [banned cruise ships from the Venice lagoon](#) after Unesco threatened to put Venice on its endangered list unless the government did so permanently. Vessels of more than 25,000 tonnes will be barred from the lagoon from 1 August.
-

Drinking blamed for cancer – Alcohol consumption is estimated to have [caused more than 740,000 cancer cases](#) around the world last year. There is strong evidence it can cause various cancers including those of the breast, liver, colon, rectum, oropharynx, larynx and oesophagus. Research suggests even low levels of drinking can increase the risk. However, public awareness appears low, and researchers say that needs to change, calling for alcohol labels to have cancer warnings, higher taxes on alcohol, and for marketing of drinks to be reduced.

Flying cheaper but rail far greener – Train fares on popular UK routes cost [50% more than flying despite causing 80% lower carbon emissions](#), according to comparisons by Which?. Between Birmingham and Newquay the return plane fare was £67 while the train cost £180. Going by rail from Bristol to Newcastle and back cost more than double flying; but the flight created 203kg of CO₂ per person, against 33kg for the train. UK campaigners are calling for a tax on the 15% of people who take 70% of all flights. The government's long-awaited transport decarbonisation plan is due to be published today with [new diesel and petrol lorries to be banned in Britain by 2040](#) and commitments to electrify the entire fleet of government cars and vans by 2027, as well as creating a net zero-emissions rail network by 2050.

Today in Focus podcast: Climate reality seared into US consciousness

An extraordinary heatwave has swept the west coast of the US and Canada, leading to record temperatures, water shortages, and hundreds of deaths – and [bringing home the catastrophic consequences of global heating](#).

Today in Focus

Climate reality seared into US consciousness

00:00:00

00:26:20

Lunchtime read: ‘Incredibly proud of this team’

Guardian readers applaud the [England football team’s “dignity and decency”](#) and the joy they brought throughout Euro 2020.



England celebrate after Jordan Pickford makes a save in the penalty shootout. Photograph: Alex Morton/UEFA/Getty Images

Sport

England face being [handed a stadium ban](#) by Uefa after the governing body opened an investigation into the [chaotic and violent scenes](#) at Wembley around the Euro 2020 final. One of the organisers of the storming of Wembley by thousands of ticketless fans has [defended the widely criticised breach](#), as more details emerged about the scale of the security lapse. The third one-day international between England and Pakistan [was a belter](#), lit up by sublime centuries from two stylists in James Vince and Babar Azam. Despite a poor record, Bryson DeChambeau has said he loves links golf and thinks [he can win his second major at this week's Open](#).

With [18 World Cup-winners](#) in the South Africa “A” matchday squad involved at Cape Town Stadium on Wednesday the hosts are about to unleash their big beasts 10 days early against the Lions. On the evidence of

an understandably hesitant return to elite competition in Gateshead, Katarina Johnson-Thompson will need to defy the odds again [to claim a dream medal in Tokyo](#). Manchester United have been dealt a significant blow with Marcus Rashford deciding [he needs surgery on a shoulder injury](#). The reigning [Tour de France](#) champion, Tadej Pogacar, is [steeling himself for last-ditch attacks](#) on his race leadership in what may prove to be the toughest day of this year's race – the 17th stage to the towering summit of the 2,215-metre Col du Portet pass on Wednesday. And Johanna Konta and [Roger Federer](#) have both [withdrawn from the Tokyo Olympics](#).

Business

Afterpay shares have tumbled 7.7% and Zip Co shares 7.6% after [PayPal launched Pay in 4](#) to let users in Australia pay for purchases in four instalments. Asian shares have been mostly lower, tracking a decline on Wall Street as investors weighed the latest quarterly earnings reports from big US companies and data pointing to rising inflation. A lower open for the FTSE is indicated while the pound is worth \$1.381 and €1.172 at time of writing.

The papers

The **Guardian**'s splash is Downing Street slashing foreign aid by billions and “putting tens of thousands of lives at risk in some of the world’s poorest nations”. You can read the story [here](#), and an editorial on the decision [here](#). The **Times** reveals that Cressida Dick “wants to continue running Britain’s biggest police force despite the Wembley security scandal and a string of other controversies”.



Guardian front page, Wednesday 14 July 2021.

Senior Tories want the party to “change its attitude” on race, the **Independent** reports. A Conservative anti-racism group says that too many MPs “misunderstood” the meaning behind players taking the knee. The **Daily Express** and **Daily Mail** lead on the decision to outlaw prosecuting soldiers who served in Northern Ireland during the troubles. The respective headlines are “Witch-hunts of hounded veterans to end” and “At last, justice for our troops”.

A couple the **Daily Telegraph** reports have been banned from travelling because they were given an AstraZeneca vaccine made in India are on the front page today, under the headline “UK travellers with Indian vaccine barred from holidays”. The **i** reports that, according to Instagram, it is “OK” to send black football players monkey emojis.

The **Financial Times** leads on US inflation accelerating faster than expected in June. The **Daily Mirror**’s headline is “You inspire us”, with a look at messages of support children have pinned to a Manchester mural of Marcus Rashford. **The Sun** has an exclusive on Harry Maguire’s father sustaining suspected broken ribs in the crush when fans stormed Wembley.

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[Alcohol](#)

Alcohol caused 740,000 cancer cases globally last year – study

Researchers behind estimate say more needs to be done to raise public awareness of link



A Lancet journal paper says there is strong evidence of alcohol consumption causing cancers of the breast, liver, colon, rectum, oropharynx, larynx and oesophagus. Photograph: Alamy

A Lancet journal paper says there is strong evidence of alcohol consumption causing cancers of the breast, liver, colon, rectum, oropharynx, larynx and oesophagus. Photograph: Alamy

Nicola Davis Science correspondent
@NicolaKSDavis

Tue 13 Jul 2021 18.30 EDT

Alcohol is estimated to have caused more than 740,000 cancer cases around the world last year, and experts say more needs to be done to highlight the link.

There is strong evidence that alcohol consumption can cause various cancers including those of the breast, liver, colon, rectum, oropharynx, larynx and oesophagus. Research suggests that even [low levels of drinking can increase the risk.](#)

However, public awareness appears low: one UK survey, [in 2018](#), found only one in 10 people were aware that alcohol could cause cancer.

Researchers say that needs to change. They revealed that in 2020 an estimated 741,300 cases of cancer, globally, were caused by alcohol. They suggested that alcohol labels should have cancer warnings, that there could be higher taxes on alcohol and that marketing of drinks could be reduced.

Harriet Rungay, of the International Agency for Research on [Cancer](#), in France, and a co-author of the study, said alcohol caused a substantial burden of cancer globally, and this was shown even at lower levels of drinking.

[Cases chart](#)

“Alcohol’s impact on cancer is often unknown or overlooked, so we need increased public awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer, and policies to decrease overall alcohol consumption to prevent the burden of cancers and other diseases attributable to alcohol,” Rungay said.

[Writing in The Lancet Oncology](#), the team describe how they made their calculations using existing alcohol consumption estimates for 2010, based on figures including tax and sales data, as well as other data such as risk estimates for cancers known to be linked to alcohol.

“There is a delay between alcohol consumption and possible cancer development, so it is necessary to factor in a latency period between the year

of alcohol exposure data and the year of cancer diagnosis,” said Rumgay.

The researchers combined these figures with existing estimates of new cancer cases expected for 2020 – based on records from previous years and hence not affected by disruptions due to the Covid pandemic – to estimate the number of cases probably caused by drinking.

The results suggested alcohol consumption was behind an estimated 568,700 cancer cases in men and 172,600 cases in women in 2020, with the majority of the cancer cases involving cancers of the oesophagus, liver and breast. However, when looking at the causes of each cancer type separately, the proportion of cases deemed caused by alcohol was highest for cancers of the oesophagus, pharynx, and lip and oral cavity.

While most alcohol-caused cancer cases were linked to heavy or “risky” drinking, even moderate or low levels of alcohol consumption were estimated to have caused cases. The data indicated that drinking up to 10g of alcohol a day – [equivalent to a half pint or small glass of wine](#) – contributed somewhere between 35,400 and 145,800 cases globally in 2020.

The findings differed by region. The proportion of cancer cases estimated to be caused by alcohol was lowest in north Africa and west Asia but highest in east Asia and central and eastern Europe. There was some variation between men and women. In the UK an estimated 4% of cancer cases in 2020, about 16,800 cases, were linked to alcohol consumption.

Rumgay said: “It would be very interesting to estimate cancer deaths due to alcohol, which is a follow-up step from the analysis that we have done here.”

The figures are likely to be underestimates, not least because they do not take into account former drinking and only include cancers where there is strong evidence of alcohol being the cause. Other complications include the risk estimates not being specific to particular populations.

Michelle Mitchell, Cancer Research UK’s chief executive, said the research demonstrated that there was still lots of work to do to prevent alcohol-related cancers.

She said: “There’s strong evidence that drinking alcohol can cause seven types of cancer, and the more someone drinks the greater their risk. There’s no safe level of drinking, but whatever your drinking habits cutting down can reduce your risk of cancer. Minimum unit pricing for alcohol, introduced in Scotland and Wales and shortly in Northern Ireland, would be a positive step for England and we urge the government to introduce it here.”

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[Britney Spears](#)

Britney Spears conservatorship case heads back to court amid turmoil

It's unclear if the pop star will appear at Wednesday's hearing, but she reportedly has been in contact with a lawyer of her choosing



Britney Spears' conservatorship case will head back to court on Wednesday.
Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

Britney Spears' conservatorship case will head back to court on Wednesday.
Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

Sam Levin in Los Angeles

[@SamTLevin](#)

Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Britney Spears's fight to end the conservatorship that has long controlled her life is heading back to court on Wednesday for a high-stakes hearing that could transform her case.

In [impassioned testimony](#) last month, the singer said the conservatorship had been “abusive” and for the first time [publicly called for the termination](#) of the legal arrangement that has given her father and others authority over her personal life and career for 13 years.

Her speech caused an upheaval in her case, which for years has been largely shrouded in secrecy. Her controversial court-appointed lawyer, Samuel D Ingham, has [asked to resign](#); the wealth management firm, Bessemer Trust, has [withdrawn](#) from overseeing her estate; her longtime manager [stepped down](#); her father, Jamie Spears, has asked the court to [investigate](#) her allegations; and lawyers involved in the case have [feuded](#) in court filings.

[Britney Spears’s court-appointed lawyer asks to resign from conservatorship](#)
[Read more](#)

The hearing is scheduled for 1.30pm local time in Los Angeles superior court. It’s unclear if Spears will be appearing again.

A major question at stake in Wednesday’s hearing is whether Spears will be able to select and hire her own lawyer. Ingham, her court lawyer, has faced [intense scrutiny](#) after Spears said in court that she did not know she could petition to terminate the conservatorship. Records have shown that Spears for years has strongly objected to the conservatorship, but Ingham, who has been [paid millions](#) from Spears’s estate, has never petitioned to end it.

Ingham was assigned to her when she was first placed in a conservatorship in 2008 and deemed incapable of hiring her own lawyer. But recent investigations have [raised questions](#) about the fraught process that led to an indefinite conservatorship, and fans have long advocated for the courts to restore her independence.

The New York Times [reported](#) this week that Spears has been in contact with Mathew Rosengart, a Hollywood lawyer and former federal prosecutor who is expected to attend the hearing this week and make the case that she should be able to hire him.



Britney Spears publicly called for the termination of her conservatorship in testimony last month. Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

Conservatorships are typically used for elderly or infirm people who are deemed incapable of making decisions, but disability rights advocates say the [process is ripe for abuse](#). Spears has questioned the merits of the arrangement, noting that she has continued to have a successful career while being denied basic autonomy. She also said the arrangement has forced her to work and take medications against her will, blocked her from getting married or having another child and controlled her personal relationships.

It can be a [long and difficult process to end conservatorships](#), but experts say it would be a gamechanger if Spears retained her own lawyer who could aggressively fight to terminate the arrangement. Jamie Spears and Jodi Montgomery, the licensed conservator who controls her healthcare, have cast blame on each other in court filings.

The flurry of resignations and in-fighting since her June testimony has given some hope to advocates with the #FreeBritney movement who have been rallying for termination for years.

“It signals that the whole thing is finally crumbling. To me, it’s the true beginning of the end,” said Megan Radford, a longtime #FreeBritney

activist, adding that it was troubling that despite her claims of mistreatment and pleas for help, she remained under control of the same people. “They are all fighting back and forth, but no one is actually doing what Britney asked to be done.”

Kevin Wu, another advocate, said he was optimistic that “her freedom is coming soon”, adding: “This is bigger than Britney. There are many people who are under abusive guardianships. The attention on her case will hopefully bring justice for many of these people.”

The American Civil Liberties Union and other disability rights groups filed an amicus brief this week in support of her right to hire her own counsel.

Attorneys for her father and Montgomery, the licensed conservator, have repeatedly defended their roles, saying their priority has been Spears’s wellbeing.

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Race

BME people in England still facing racial inequality, report says

Legislation, institutional practices and society's customs continue to harm BME groups, Runnymede Trust report says



A man walks past a poster calling for an end to section 60 near Tottenham police station. The report raises concerns over section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which allows officers to stop and search people with no grounds for suspicion. Photograph: Thabo Jaiyesimi/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

A man walks past a poster calling for an end to section 60 near Tottenham police station. The report raises concerns over section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which allows officers to stop and search people with no grounds for suspicion. Photograph: Thabo Jaiyesimi/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Nazia Parveen Community affairs correspondent

[@NParveenG](#)

Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.01 EDT

A comprehensive review on race equality in England has warned that the government's approach is at risk of failing international human rights obligations.

The report, compiled by the Runnymede Trust using evidence from more than 100 civil society organisations since 2016, shows that systemic racism remains a stark issue and that legislation, institutional practices and society's customs continue to harm BME groups. It is presented to the UN committee on the elimination of racial discrimination and is used as a barometer to assess member countries' progress on race equality.

Published in the wake of an unprecedented global pandemic and worldwide protests following the murder of George Floyd in the US, it states that disparities facing black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in England are sustained across the areas of health, the criminal justice system, education, employment, immigration and politics. The general trend from the data shows that inequality along racial lines has escalated since the same report was released five years ago.

Endorsed by 78 NGOs and race equality organisations, key findings include:

- Black people are about 18 times more likely to be searched than their white counterparts.
- BME children make up over half of the child population in prison (28% are black). This is an increase of 15% over the past decade.
- By the end of secondary school, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are almost three years behind their white counterparts, and black Caribbean students are 11 months behind their white British counterparts.
- BME people with learning disabilities die younger than their white counterparts; there is a 26-year difference between white and BME people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

- Had the white population experienced the same risk of death from Covid-19 as black groups, there would have been an estimated 58,000 additional deaths between March and May 2020.
- In 2019, 90% of Australian nationals were released before spending 28 days in detention compared with 60% of Nigerian nationals and 40% of Jamaican nationals.

Dr Halima Begum, the CEO of the Runnymede Trust, said the UK was one of the few countries in the world where accurate state-led analysis of racial equality was even vaguely feasible.

“Progress has been made. But race has become a needlessly fractious issue in the national discourse, and many members of our black and minority ethnic communities continue to experience stark disproportionate outcomes in their life chances,” she said.

She added: “From stop and search to inequalities in maternal health; lower levels of home ownership to constraints on pay and professional opportunities, this report provides further evidence that taking a colourblind approach to equality will not be the most effective way to achieve social mobility.”

This independent civil society report is submitted to the UN committee every four years alongside an equivalent government report.

The report raises considerable concern about forthcoming legislation, including the electoral integrity bill, the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill and the new immigration plan, which it says could pose a significant threat to ethnic minorities’ rights.

It recommends urgent reforms including the development and implementation of a strategy to eliminate racial discrimination and advance race equality across all policy areas based on wide, open-ended, comprehensive consultation with civil society organisations and communities.

It also recommends a consultation on proposals to introduce automatic voter registration of all British citizens and eligible foreign nationals once they reach the age of 18, a statutory time limit on immigration detention, and a repeal of section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which allows officers to stop and search people with no grounds for suspicion.

This year a much-delayed report by No 10's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities was widely criticised, with the commission's chairman, Dr Tony Sewell, said the report did not deny that racism exists in Britain, but there was no evidence "of actual institutional racism".

But race equality experts described it as "extremely disturbing" and offensive to BME key workers who have died in disproportionate numbers during the pandemic.

Lord Simon Woolley, the director of Operation Black Vote, said the "divisive and dishonest" Sewell report into race inequality represented the biggest lost opportunity to effectively tackle systemic racism in the UK.

"This shadow report, in sharp contrast, offers a number of strategic recommendations which together present a sorely needed comprehensive race equality strategy fit for the 21st century," he added.

A government spokesperson said significant progress has been made and has gone "beyond our commitments to the ICERD since our last report in 2015".

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[Inflation](#)

UK inflation jumps to 2.5% as secondhand car and food prices rise

June figure is highest level since August 2018 and above analysts' forecasts

- [Business live updates: UK inflation rises to 2.5% in June](#)
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The Office for National Statistics says there are reports of an increased demand for secondhand cars. Photograph: Justin Kase z12z/Alamy

The Office for National Statistics says there are reports of an increased demand for secondhand cars. Photograph: Justin Kase z12z/Alamy

[Larry Elliott](#) Economics editor

Wed 14 Jul 2021 03.22 EDT

Britain's inflation rate has risen to 2.5% – its highest level in almost three years – after the easing of coronavirus lockdown restrictions prompted rising demand.

The [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#) said dearer food, secondhand cars, clothing and footwear and fuel prices were the main factors behind a jump in the annual inflation rate from 2.1% to 2.5% in June.

The figure was the highest since the 2.7% recorded in August 2018, higher than the 2.2% expected by analysts and above the Bank of England's 2% target.

Core inflation, which strips out food, energy, alcohol and tobacco, rose from 2% to 2.3%.

Threadneedle Street policymakers have said they expect rising inflation to be [temporary](#) and have signalled it will not trigger an early increase in interest rates from their record low of 0.1%.

According to the ONS, part of the increase in inflation as measured by the consumer prices index was caused by the bounceback in prices after they were depressed during lockdown.

Jonathan Athow, the deputy national statistician for economic statistics at the ONS, said: “The rise was widespread, for example, coming from price increases for food and for secondhand cars where there are reports of increased demand.

“Some of the increase is from temporary effects, for example, rising fuel prices which continue to increase inflation, but much of this is due to prices recovering from lows earlier in the pandemic. An increase in prices for clothing and footwear, compared with the normal seasonal pattern of summer sales, also added to the upward pressure this month.”

Guardian business email sign-up

Samuel Tombs, the chief UK economist at the consultancy Pantheon Macroeconomics, said businesses were seeking to take advantage of strong consumer demand after the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions.

“The rise in the core rate in June was driven by increases in clothing inflation to 3.0%, from 2.1% in May, and catering services inflation to 2.2%,

from 1.4%. In addition, a jump in secondhand cars inflation to 5.5%, from 0.9%, boosted the headline rate by 0.08 percentage points.”

Yael Selfin, the chief economist at KPMG UK, said: “While a combination of factors could push inflation further above the Bank of England’s 2% target, as many businesses continue to grapple with rising costs and supply chain shortages, we expect it to peak at around 3% by the end of this year.

“The prospects of cooling inflationary pressures next year, as firms adjust to new levels of demand, should provide the Bank of England with room to keep interest rates unchanged for a while longer.”

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Heritage

19th-century bronze tortoises returned to Dorset mansion after 30 years

National Trust announces happy conclusion to ‘heritage crime’ of theft from Kingston Lacy



The four returned tortoises which were stolen from Kingston Lacy in Dorset.
Photograph: National Trust Images/James Dobson

The four returned tortoises which were stolen from Kingston Lacy in Dorset.
Photograph: National Trust Images/James Dobson

Mark Brown, Arts correspondent

Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Four 19th-century bronze tortoises stolen from a historic mansion nearly 30 years ago have, in an appropriately slow way, been recovered and returned to their rightful home.

The National Trust on Wednesday announced a happy conclusion to a heritage crime case that shines light on the fascinating life of [William John](#)

Bankes, a collector and adventurer who fled England because of sexual relations with guardsmen and a man once described by his friend Lord Byron as the “father of all mischief”.

The story of their recovery, said James Rothwell, the trust’s national curator for decorative arts, was also a “heartwarming” one involving people keen to do the right thing and return objects to where they should be.

The tortoises were commissioned by Bankes in 1853 from [the sculptor Carlo Marochetti](#), a man who would become more famous for [casting the four Landseer lions guarding Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square](#).

Before the four lions, there were the 16 tortoises – requested by Bankes to support four Verona marble urns in the grounds of the family home, Kingston Lacy in Dorset.



Kingston Lacy, the family home of William John Bankes, who commissioned the tortoises. Photograph: Peter/Alamy

Bankes had a fondness for tortoises and loaned Marochetti one of his pet tortoises as a model.

After collecting his pet from Marochetti’s Paris studio he wrote to his sister: “Think of my carrying a live Tortoise in a bag all the way from the Palais

Royal!"

The tortoises supported the urns for 140 years until, in 1992, a gardener noticed four had gone missing. The theft was reported to the police and the remainder were removed to a safer place, replaced by replicas.

Rothwell said hopes of recovering the tortoises had faded until the trust was contacted by Tim Knox, the director of the Royal Collection and a former head curator of the National Trust. He spotted a bronze tortoise listed for auction. Could it be one of the stolen tortoises?

Rothwell soon established it was from Kingston Lacy, being sold by someone who had bought it in good faith. The consignor readily agreed it should be returned.

Further digging revealed the dealer it was purchased from. He too had bought in good faith, in 1999, and still had the three remaining tortoises.

"I said we'd love to see them back at Kingston Lacy and would he be happy for that," said Rothwell. "He said: 'Absolutely'. Not only that, he said he would love to take them back himself.

"I've been involved in a number of cases when we haven't got things back and it is very frustrating.

"To find that throughout I was dealing with people, including the auction house, who were just so helpful and pleased to see them come back was a wonderful experience."

Bankes was living in Europe when he commissioned the tortoises, effectively [exiled from Britain because of his homosexuality](#). In 1841 he was, for a second time, charged with taking part in an "indecent act" with a guardsman.

"He faced not just going to prison but losing his entire estate so instead he handed it over to his brother and fled the country," said Elena Greer, property curator at Kingston Lacy.

While in exile he would obsessively collect and commission things for the house, including the bronze tortoises.

The story, said Greer, reflects the quirkiness of Banks. “I get the impression he was very playful … a man of great character and fun,” she said.

Greer said Banks obviously had a fondness for tortoises. “It is clearly a creature that brought much pleasure to the family and so it is wonderful that we can welcome four of our tortoise residents back home after such a long time and can display them for our visitors to enjoy.”

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Vaccines and immunisation

WHO warns of ‘chaos’ if individuals mix Covid vaccines

Chief scientist says organisation is awaiting data on studies combining vaccines but that health agencies can make decision to mix shots

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A nurse administers a Pfizer vaccine to a durian fruit vendor at his house in rural Malaysia Photograph: Vincent Thian/AP

A nurse administers a Pfizer vaccine to a durian fruit vendor at his house in rural Malaysia Photograph: Vincent Thian/AP

Guardian staff and agencies

Tue 13 Jul 2021 21.14 EDT

The World Health Organization's chief scientist has advised individuals against mixing and matching Covid-19 vaccines from different manufacturers, saying such decisions should be left to public health authorities.

"It's a little bit of a dangerous trend here," Soumya Swaminathan told an online briefing on Monday after a question about booster shots. "It will be a chaotic situation in countries if citizens start deciding when and who will be taking a second, a third and a fourth dose."

Swaminathan had called mixing a "data-free zone" but later clarified her remarks in an overnight [tweet](#).

[US officials call for more data on vaccine boosters as Pfizer pushes for third shot](#)

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"Individuals should not decide for themselves, public health agencies can, based on available data," she said in the tweet. "Data from mix and match studies of different vaccines are awaited – immunogenicity and safety both need to be evaluated."

Some studies are showing positive results from mixing vaccines, but these are [in preprint stage](#) and need further studies to support them. Mixing vaccines is seen as an option in some countries where supply is short of one particular vaccine. But WHO is concerned about a situation where individuals decide for themselves which vaccines to get and how far apart to space them without guidance from health authorities.

The WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on vaccines said in June the Pfizer Inc vaccine could be used as a second dose after an initial dose of AstraZeneca, if the latter is not available.

A clinical trial led by the University of Oxford in the UK is ongoing to investigate mixing the regimen of AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines. The trial

was recently expanded to include the Moderna Inc and Novavax Inc vaccines.

The comments came as Vietnam announced it would offer the coronavirus vaccine jointly developed by Pfizer and BioNTech as a second dose option for people first inoculated with the AstraZeneca vaccine.

[India's Covid vaccine rollout hit by hesitancy and supply snags](#)

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Vietnam's mass inoculation campaign is in its early stages, with fewer than 300,000 people fully vaccinated so far. It has so far used AstraZeneca's viral vector vaccine and last week took delivery of 97,000 doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech mRNA shot.

"Pfizer vaccines will be prioritised for people who were given first shot of AstraZeneca 8-12 weeks before," the government said in a statement.

Several countries, including Canada, Spain and South Korea, have already approved such dose-mixing mainly due to concerns about rare and potentially fatal blood clots linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine.

A Spanish study found the Pfizer-AstraZeneca combination was highly safe and effective, according to preliminary results.

Reuters contributed to this report

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US news

Delta variant gains ground in US as outbreaks highlight vaccine divide

Infection rates in Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi are among the highest in the US – and their vaccination rates are among the lowest



About 55% of all Americans are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, according to the CDC. Photograph: Nathan Papes/AP

About 55% of all Americans are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, according to the CDC. Photograph: Nathan Papes/AP



[Jessica Glenza](#)

[@JessicaGlenza](#)

Wed 14 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

A cluster of midwestern and southern states have emerged as a new center of Covid-19 outbreaks, as the highly transmissible Delta variant sweeps across poorly vaccinated populations in the US.

The news marks a potentially serious setback for the Biden administration's attempts to curb and control the pandemic as the Delta variant – which has wreaked havoc in the UK and elsewhere – is starting to spread more widely in America.

[In a pandemic, US workers without paid medical leave can't afford a sick day](#)

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It also comes as life in much of the US has started to return to near normal, with many Covid-19 restrictions having been lifted, and as the vaccination program has slowed down.

Rates of Covid-19 cases in Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi are among the highest in the country, and their vaccination rates among the lowest. Covid also appears to be gaining ground in the [American west](#).

Even so, overall numbers of new Covid-19 cases are low. New infections are less than one-tenth the average daily rate at the height of the pandemic in January, even as they have doubled in the last two weeks.

“We are not where we were in April 2020,” said Dr David Dowdy, an associate professor of epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University and an expert in infectious diseases. Nevertheless, he said, “We’ve seen those counts can go up substantially and quickly, so we need to be cautious but without panicking.”

About 55% of all Americans are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Vaccines authorized by the Food and Drug Administration remain safe and highly effective against Covid-19 and its variants, including Delta. State officials said the overwhelming majority of people now hospitalized with Covid-19 are unvaccinated.

However, localized outbreaks highlight a growing divide in vaccine adoption among US states, as a complex set of conditions have left Republican-leaning and rural places with lower overall vaccination rates than Democratic-leaning states.

We’ve seen those counts can go up substantially and quickly, so we need to be cautious but without panicking

Dr David Dowdy

“The people who have not gotten vaccinated so far are a very diverse group,” said Dowdy. “It’s easy to portray it as ... a political stripe, but vaccination rates are higher, for example, in those who are older, and that’s irrespective of political leaning.”

Daily vaccination rates nationally have fallen precipitously, from an average peak of 3.4m a day to about 432,000 a day presently. States [such as Mississippi and Alabama](#) have some of the worst vaccination rates in the nation, with just about one-third of their populations vaccinated. By contrast, Vermont has vaccinated 67% of its population.

Between April and July, the divide in vaccination rates between counties that voted for Joe Biden versus counties that voted for Donald Trump widened from 2.2% to 11.7%, according to the health research organization the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#). Republicans remain the [most vaccine adverse group](#) in the nation. States across the midwestern and southern region now experiencing a Covid-19 outbreak have long ranked worse on a wide variety of health metrics.

At the same time, vaccination has allowed more people to move freely in society, making it difficult to unpick the effect of the Delta variant from that of changed human behavior, Dowdy said.

There remains “a group of conservative people who just don’t want to get it for political reasons”, said Aaron Wendelboe, a professor of epidemiology at the University of [Oklahoma](#), and a former state epidemiologist amid the pandemic in [Oklahoma](#). Nevertheless, experts including Wendelboe warn vaccine hesitancy is complex and multifaceted.

“We have a Republican governor who’s vaccinated, we have Republican leadership who’s vaccinated, and we’re a heavily red state,” said Dr Jennifer Dilaha, the director for immunizations at the [Arkansas](#) department of health. “I’m not sure to what degree the political differences in our state play a role, I think it’s likely other factors involved that are playing a heavier role.”

Dilaha said many Arkansans, particularly the young, underestimate the severity of disease caused by Covid-19, and overestimate risks associated with vaccines, which have proven very safe.

“They’re not familiar with the long-term consequences” of Covid-19, “because we’re still learning about them,” Dilaha said. “People do not realize that people with Covid-19 can have permanent lung damage, heart damage, kidney damage, brain damage.”

In recent weeks, more than 98% of people hospitalized with Covid-19 in Arkansas and Oklahoma have been unvaccinated. And in Arkansas, officials are seeing many more people in their 20s, 30s and 40s hospitalized.

While vaccine hesitancy remains complex, conservative lawmakers' constant attacks on pandemic mitigation measures, intentionally or not, underscore the false idea that Covid-19 is not as severe as public health officials warn.

In Oklahoma, lawmakers have [introduced legislation](#) to make school mask mandates far more difficult to implement even as children under 12 remain ineligible for the vaccine, and to ban vaccine mandates. As it stands, most schools are in summer recess, most do not have done away with mask mandates, and none mandate vaccines.

Lawmakers in Tennessee attacked the top vaccine official in the state, eventually leading to her dismissal. After politicians criticized health officials, all vaccine-related messaging was abandoned, even for unrelated vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and human papilloma virus (HPV). More than 30,000 families missed measles vaccines during the pandemic.

"When the people elected and appointed to lead this state put their political gains ahead of the public good, they have betrayed the people who have trusted them with their lives," wrote Dr Michelle Fiscus in an editorial in the [Tennessean newspaper](#).

In [Missouri](#), Republican governor Mike Parson lashed out at the Biden administration's announcement surge teams would help states vaccinate people in a door-to-door effort.

"I have directed our health department to tell the federal government that sending government employees or agents door-to-door to compel vaccination would NOT be an effective OR welcome strategy in Missouri!" Parson [wrote on Twitter on Wednesday night](#).

The speed with which the Delta variant can spread among unvaccinated populations was demonstrated in a recently released investigation into an

outbreak in a gymnastics gym in Oklahoma.

In an outbreak investigated by the CDC, 47 people were sickened with Covid-19 in April. Among the 21 people whose test samples could be sequenced, all were found to have the Delta variant.

Among those infected, 85% did not have a Covid-19 vaccine, many of them adolescents who were ineligible to receive the vaccine at the time. The CDC recommends unvaccinated people wear masks, but the gym had poor mask adherence and ventilation. Indoor, high-intensity sports are among the most high-risk activities for unvaccinated people.

“I’m very concerned that we are already seeing a surge in cases,” said Wendelboe, who created his own model to track transmission in the state. He expects Delta to result in five times as many Covid-19 cases in August, and 10 times as many by December.

Even a small increase in vaccine rates could help mitigate this outcome, he said. Otherwise, Oklahoma may, “continue to see just an uptick in cases all the way through the winter”.

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About 20% of UK adults have deleted NHS Covid app, poll suggests

More younger people have got rid of track and trace app, most likely to avoid having to self-isolate

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Poll by Savanta ComRes suggests more than a third of 18-34 year olds have got rid of app. Photograph: Jakub Porzycki/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Poll by Savanta ComRes suggests more than a third of 18-34 year olds have got rid of app. Photograph: Jakub Porzycki/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 14.37 EDT

About one in five adults of all ages in the UK had the [NHS](#) Covid-19 app but have deleted it from their phone, with a significantly greater proportion of younger people having done so, a poll suggests.

The findings come after opposition politicians expressed concern last week that many people might choose to delete the app in case an increase in infections linked to the lifting of many restrictions on 19 July results in their being ordered to self-isolate.

According to a poll by Savanta ComRes, more than a third of people aged between 18 and 34 years in the UK have deleted the app already, with about a third of those who do still have it expressing an intention to delete it in six days' time. Among adults of all ages, that proportion was about 20%.

[Replacing isolation with unreliable Covid tests will put pupils in England in harm's way | Deepti Gurdasani](#)

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“We know both that the number of people downloading the NHS Covid-19 app was never as high as desired and that some people who downloaded it have already deleted it,” said Prof Henry Potts, of University College London, who specialises in the use of technology in healthcare.

Potts, who has acted as an adviser to the government, told the Guardian: “Anecdotally, many people turn it off or do not use it as directed. This all reduces the potential efficacy of the app.”

He added that while he did see strong evidence that people were acting on an expectation of increased caseloads after 19 July, “what will happen is that the more the app presents an inconvenience for people and the more they see Covid-19 as less of an issue, then the more likely they will be to stop using the app.”

Potts said he would advise ministers to overhaul and put greater resources into the testing, tracing and isolating system, saying other nations that had done so had avoided the long national lockdowns seen in the UK.

Savanta ComRes interviewed 2,137 UK adults aged 18 years and older online between 9 and 11 July. Data was weighted to be representative of all UK adults by age, sex, region and socioeconomic group.

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Schools in England to eschew summer ‘catch-up’ and put health first

Exclusive: heads prioritise wellbeing despite fears over lost learning in pandemic, survey reveals



Headteachers cited the need for staff and pupils to have a proper break over the summer as a major reason why they wouldn't be offering extra learning provision over the holiday. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

Headteachers cited the need for staff and pupils to have a proper break over the summer as a major reason why they wouldn't be offering extra learning provision over the holiday. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

[Sally Weale](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 19.00 EDT

Fewer than one in five [schools](#) in England are planning to run “catch-up” provision during the summer holiday because headteachers are worried about pupil and staff wellbeing, according to a survey of school leaders seen exclusively by the Guardian.

Just 18% of those who took part in the poll said they would be offering voluntary catch-up provision during the six-week break, while a mere 5% said they would ask pupils to do extra homework over the summer.

The government is concerned about the amount of learning children have lost during the course of the pandemic and has encouraged schools to offer additional support during the summer, but there is concern among some school leaders about pupils' mental health.

The [prime minister](#) said last week he was in favour of extending the school day for additional tuition and activities, but 75% of leaders who took part in the survey said they had no plans to do so.

Of those who were not planning extra summer provision, 88% said they felt their staff needed a proper break over the summer and 70% said their pupils needed a break. About a third (34%) said they did not think families would be supportive.

The survey was conducted among 1,150 primary and secondary school leaders by the Key, an education resource that supports more than 12,500 schools across UK. Nicola West Jones, the head of market research at the Key, said: "While helping children to catch up on lost learning is high-priority for headteachers and their leadership teams, it's clear that the wellbeing of their children and teachers has to come first."

"The summer holidays are a time for everyone to reset and refresh in order to hit the ground running in the new school year. Given the difficulties our school communities have faced over the past 18 months, they deserve this respite now more than ever."

Catch-up during the summer has been a key theme for ministers. Secondary schools were invited to apply for extra funding for summer schools aimed at pupils moving up from primary, while all schools are eligible to receive a catch-up premium which can be used for running summer programmes.

A separate report by the National Foundation for Educational Research says school catch-up plans should give equal emphasis to both emotional and academic support.

School leaders told the NFER that the current approach to learning recovery was “misconceived and inadequate”, with reports of deteriorating wellbeing and mental health among pupils.

Researchers interviewed senior leaders in 50 schools in deprived areas in [England](#), many of whom reported an increase in the number of incidents of poor behaviour during the pandemic.

They said anxiety was the most common issue for pupils, including separation anxiety, an increase in school refusal, hyper-vigilance, germaphobia and performance anxiety or fear of failure.

A substantial minority reported “an increase in instances of actual or threatened self-harm, including suicide”, which was more common among older pupils but not confined to secondary schools. One primary leader said the number of their school’s children referred to the NHS’s child and adolescent mental health services ([Camhs](#)) increased from one before the pandemic to 11 afterwards.

The Department for Education recently announced an additional £1.4bn in school catch-up funding, on top of £1.7bn already committed. The DfE has been contacted for comment.

A DfE spokesperson said: “Almost three out of four mainstream secondary schools [have signed up] to deliver a summer school programme so far, helping young people recover from the disruption to their education.

“In primary schools, school leaders can target catch-up funding to best support their pupils, including through small group tutoring or access to technology, with no expectation of summer provision unless schools decide that is the best way to support young people.”

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Hospitals

Healthcare providers in England can still insist on masks after 19 July

Majority of GPs want face coverings to remain compulsory in healthcare settings, BMA survey finds

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The BMA warned that infection rates would rise if mask-wearing did not stay mandatory. Photograph: Alamy

The BMA warned that infection rates would rise if mask-wearing did not stay mandatory. Photograph: Alamy

[Rowena Mason Deputy political editor](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 14.02 EDT

Hospitals, GPs and other health providers will still be able to require patients and visitors to wear masks unless they are exempt, after Public Health England (PHE) said existing guidance on Covid infection control will continue beyond 19 July.

Health providers have been pressing the government for clarity on the status of face coverings in hospitals and GP surgeries when legal requirements on mask-wearing will be lifted, with the NHS Confederation saying it wants mandatory mask-wearing to continue.

In response, PHE made clear on Tuesday that its infection prevention control (IPC) guidance is to remain in place, meaning the current situation on mask-wearing in health and care settings will continue.

Under the guidelines agreed by the four nations of the UK and put in place for the pandemic, it sets out the need for “use of facemasks/coverings by all outpatients (if tolerated) and visitors when entering a hospital, GP/dental surgery or other care settings”. It also recommends physical distancing of 2 metres and thorough hand hygiene, with “patients in all care areas still to be encouraged and supported to wear a face mask, providing it is tolerated and is not detrimental to their medical or care needs”.

[Rise in Covid cases will put intense pressure on NHS, bosses warn](#)
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The guidance also gives GP surgeries and hospitals the green light to continue with virtual appointments beyond the 19 July unlocking date.

“Where possible and clinically appropriate remote consultations rather than face to face should be offered to patients/individuals,” the guidance said.

No 10 said on Tuesday that the rules for face coverings would be different in health and care settings, compared with other public places.

Dr Susan Hopkins, PHE's Covid-19 strategic response director, said: "There is current IPC guidance in place in healthcare settings and both patient and staff safety must remain the highest priority. The guidance, which includes measures for both staff and visitors, covers appropriate use of face covering and social distancing. The guidance is under constant review based on available and emerging evidence."

[Ministers accused of causing confusion over face masks in England](#)

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A Whitehall source said the continuation of the Covid IPC guidance meant mask-wearing would effectively still be mandatory in hospitals.

Amid a lack of clarity about the rules, the Health Service Journal reported that numerous [NHS](#) trust chiefs were planning to insist public visitors continue to wear masks regardless of government advice.

Senior leaders, however, told the publication they expected continuing to enforce face masks for the public would create significant issues.

Some of the trusts that confirmed to the HSJ that they would insist on masks include Sherwood Forest hospitals foundation trust, Leeds teaching hospitals trust, Dorset county hospital FT, Northumbria Healthcare FT, George Eliot hospitals, Birmingham Women's and Children's hospital, South Warwickshire FT and Wye Valley trust.

A survey by the British Medical Association revealed that nine in 10 doctors – 91% – want face masks to remain compulsory in GP practices and other healthcare settings where practical when Covid restrictions are lifted.

Revealing the results of the survey of 2,500 doctors, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, BMA council chair, said: "If the prime minister does not continue to make mask-wearing mandatory, we will see a sustained and even steeper rise in infection rates across the summer and beyond, which will significantly impact on our NHS and result in more serious illness and hospitalisation. Simply 'expecting' people to wear one is not good enough and sends out a confusing mixed message to the public."

The NHS Confederation, which represents most NHS organisations that provide care, was on Tuesday night still calling for the government to make a “crystal clear” statement about the need for patients and visitors to wear masks in healthcare settings to prevent people getting confused.

Matthew Taylor, its chief executive, said: “Covid-19 has not gone away and although the vaccine is helping to reduce the severity and impact of the disease, we really do have to continue to be careful and try to protect ourselves and each other.

“We know that face masks are proven to reduce the spread of Covid-19, which is why the overwhelming majority of our members are urging the government to be crystal clear with the public and say that it is a mandatory requirement to wear a face mask in all healthcare settings. NHS leaders are very concerned that unless the message is simple and unambiguous people may get confused and make their own rules, which could put others at risk.”

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End to Covid rules for England ‘leaves 3.8m vulnerable people feeling abandoned’

Charities warn that shift on 19 July to personal choice on virus precautions is instilling fear in many most at risk

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The government is advising clinically extremely vulnerable people to ‘continue to take extra precautions to protect themselves’. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty

The government is advising clinically extremely vulnerable people to ‘continue to take extra precautions to protect themselves’. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty

Natalie Grover Science correspondent

@NatalieGrover

Tue 13 Jul 2021 14.12 EDT

Cancer patients, disabled people and other clinically extremely vulnerable groups say they will feel unsafe stepping the house after hearing that mask and social distancing requirements are to be abandoned, charities have warned.

Campaigners estimate that 3.8 million people have been left feeling abandoned by the government’s shift towards promoting “personal responsibility” as the sole means of navigating the surging Covid-19 infection rates in [England](#).

It means many people wary of coming into close contact with others who are infected will have to resort to self-imposed shielding.

The new government guidance for England advises those most at risk from the virus to [continue to be cautious](#), meeting friends and family outside where possible and wearing face coverings on public transport.

Many vulnerable groups, such as those with underlying conditions or elderly people who shielded last year, were prioritised for vaccination. Roughly half of the UK is now fully vaccinated but Covid-19 cases are once again surging, driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant and the lifting of some restrictions.

Certain people with underlying conditions have weak immune systems that render the vaccines less effective, leaving these groups anxious about their fate.

“Macmillan Cancer Support is hearing huge anxiety about the removal of restrictions at the same time as cases are rising very fast,” said Steven McIntosh, Macmillan’s executive director of advocacy and communications.

“Cancer patients feel they’re at risk of just going backwards, and feel unsafe stepping outside the house.”

It was “very frustrating”, McIntosh added, as the government had publicly confirmed its plans to discard almost all Covid social restrictions on 19 July but then released guidance for clinically vulnerable people only later in the evening, without consultation with the groups representing and supporting those individuals.

He said: “The government hasn’t learned the lessons of the past where big announcements for the whole of the country about … changes to restrictions weren’t accompanied by advice for those people who are most at risk and most anxious about those changes.”

Clinically extremely vulnerable people also include those with Down’s syndrome, cystic fibrosis and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Louise Rubin, the head of policy and campaigns at the disability equality charity Scope, said: “Throughout the pandemic clinically extremely vulnerable people have felt forgotten and that their lives are seen as expendable. This guidance will make many clinically extremely vulnerable people feel they are on their own, having to rely on others taking responsibility, and without the support to keep themselves safe.”

Elizabeth Cleaver, a solicitor at the London-based law firm Bindmans LLP, said her firm had had a number of inquiries from concerned parents who had been shielding their clinically vulnerable children and were keen to have them vaccinated against Covid.

Although the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has given the green light for the use of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for children over the age of 12, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has not yet issued a recommendation for vaccinating under-18s.

Cleaver said: “We haven’t issued proceedings because we are awaiting confirmation as to whether there is going to be some JCVI guidance published this week … we’re giving the government the last opportunity this week to actually issue that. Obviously the opening up [of society] on 19 July

has really increased anxiety for these families because their clinically vulnerable children are even more vulnerable.”

Other organisations have raised the alarm about the confusion the new measures will bring to workplaces. Businesses say they do not have the full picture they need to properly plan for unlocking.

Claire Walker, a co-executive director of the British Chambers of Commerce, said: “Business leaders aren’t public health experts and cannot be expected to know how best to operate when confusing and sometimes contradictory advice is coming from official sources. This could lead to an inconsistent approach with different businesses reopening at different times and with different requirements, which could damage public confidence, give firms a huge logistical headache, and create a real risk of the economic recovery splintering.”

Kevin Rowan, of the TUC, said the effective, enforceable health and safety guidance now being removed made things very difficult for employers. He said: “It’s going to be a situation where individuals may or may not wear face masks. Some employers may require it, others won’t. But none of those issues are going to be legally enforceable. So if you’re in the Health and Safety Executive or in a local authority’s environmental health [section], there’s nothing for you to enforce.”

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Global development

Hunger sweeps India in Covid's shadow as millions miss out on rations

Desperation grows for those unable to access subsidised food, as worst hunger in two decades reported



One of many community kitchens that have stepped in to feed the millions of Indians left without jobs or access to food aid in the recession.
Photograph: Handout

One of many community kitchens that have stepped in to feed the millions of Indians left without jobs or access to food aid in the recession.
Photograph: Handout

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Kavitha Iyer

Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

When India's devastating second wave of Covid-19 struck in April, Nazia Habib Khan's second marriage abruptly came to an end after a year of beatings and abuse. The 28-year-old daughter of migrants from the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh returned to live with her mother, brothers and a sister-in-law in Mumbai.

Their 40 sq metre (400 sq ft) home in Kurla East stands huddled among the 800 or so brick, tin sheet and tarpaulin houses of Qureshi Nagar, the entire shanty town trembling when a train roars past on a nearby railway line.

Once on the housekeeping staff at a hospital and later a domestic help who washed utensils and floors, Khan is now without work, income or savings. To keep tensions and arguments in her overcrowded home to a minimum, she waits every morning and evening for a small package of food from a community kitchen operated by a women's savings group.

Khan has been entirely dependent on food aid since the kitchen was launched in April to supply free meals to the slum's impoverished, jobless

residents. She comes every day, for lunch and dinner for herself and her two daughters, aged 10 and 11 months.



Sujata Sawant, who runs a community kitchen in the Qureshi Nagar slum in Mumbai. ‘We are supplying 1,300 meals every day now. And 90% of those who take our food do not have any other source.’ Photograph: Courtesy of Khaana Chahiye Foundation

“My own earning is zero, so I try not to let my children’s food be an additional expense for my family,” says Khan. One night last week, her toddler was running a high fever and Khan couldn’t leave the house. She asked a neighbour’s 10-year-old boy to collect the dinners of *khichdi* (rice and lentils), *roti sabzi* (bread and vegetables) or a *pulao* rice dish. “The alternative was to sleep hungry.”

Khan and her daughters are among millions of Indians unable to access subsidised rice and wheat under India’s [National Food Security Act](#) (NFSA), a 2013 law that entitles 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive highly subsidised food through the targeted public distribution system (TPDS). Two-thirds of Indians are eligible to receive quotas in different categories on presenting their ration card at designated “fair-price shops”. The TPDS is one of the world’s largest food-distribution networks.

Can a slum-dweller without a job afford a cooking gas cylinder?

Sujata Sawant, Kurla community kitchen

India's domestic migrants, long unable to access their right to food because they live away from their home states where they are registered for the benefits, face more hunger and desperation today than at any time in the past two decades. Analysis by [Pew Research](#) in March found that the number of India's poorest people – those earning \$2 or less a day – had increased by 75 million due to the recession brought on by Covid.

The Kurla slum is home to day labourers and women who work as domestic help or maids, all migrants from other states, whose ration cards are registered at their home addresses or who have no ration card at all.

Khan's neighbours include drivers whose families collect their quota of grains from their homes in Uttar Pradesh, as well as men from Tamil Nadu's poorest villages living in groups who make a living selling *idlis* (steamed rice cakes). There are also itinerant vendors of detergent and steel wool, originally from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. Work and incomes have shrunk dramatically across most households. The month of April 2020 alone saw [122 million Indians lose their jobs](#), including almost all day labourers.



Nirbhay Yadav, 50, in a checked scarf, and his son Lovelesh, left, wait with other migrant labourers in Delhi in hope of a day's work. About 122 million workers lost their jobs when Covid hit in April 2020. Photograph: Manish Swarup/AP

The Kurla community kitchen that Khan depends on has sought more funding as the number of poor and hungry who use it grows. "We are supplying 1,300 meals every day now," says Sujata Sawant, who runs the kitchen. "And 90% of those who take our food do not have any other source."

In 2020, Sawant mobilised donations for 14,500 grocery parcels but in the two months since the second lockdown in May this year, she has already distributed 4,500 of them.

On 29 June, responding to Covid-induced distress among migrant workers in towns and cities across India, the supreme court ordered key reforms including expediting the rollout of a "one nation, one ration card" scheme to allow migrants to buy subsidised grain from outlets anywhere in the country, while their families continue to claim their entitlement at home. The country's top court set a deadline of 31 July for this and also ordered registration of all casual and migrant workers, and community kitchens to be set up for labourers until at least the end of the pandemic.

"This will still leave out the millions who do not have ration cards at all," says Mukta Srivastava, Maharashtra state's convener for the Right to Food Campaign, a coalition of civil society groups whose lobbying led to the NFSA being enacted. "This exclusion in the current economic conditions exacerbates hunger," she says.

All of us working on hunger relief since the pandemic began can see that hunger persists

Neeraj Shetye

Currently, the NFSA benefits about 800 million people. But 67% of India's 1.3 billion population is supposed to be eligible. The shortfall from the

legally mandated coverage is more than 100 million, according to [estimates](#) by the economists Jean Drèze, Reetika Khera and Meghna Mungikar.

During the pandemic, the number of Indians living below the [international poverty line](#) (less than \$2 a day) has grown. One of the court's directives was to consider re-determining the total number of NFSA beneficiaries. Yet, despite the pandemic's effects on jobs and the economy, the government's top thinktank, the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), reportedly recommended a cut in the percentages of people covered in rural and urban areas, reducing total coverage of the food security law.



Mumbai's Kurla East slum, where most families have seen their income slashed since Covid swept across India. Photograph: Courtesy of Khaana Chahiye Foundation

Sawant says cardholders are often unable to obtain their full quota, are turned away by shop owners or cheated with low quantities. Some items such as paraffin, a key domestic fuel, are no longer provided through the TPDS. "Can a slum dweller without a job afford a cooking gas cylinder that costs 900 rupees [£9]?" asks Sawant.

Repeated increases in fuel tax have led to soaring prices, further eroding disposable incomes and putting more basic goods out of reach for millions

of Indians. The first week of July alone recorded five increases in petrol prices and three in diesel; June and May each witnessed 16 separate price rises for diesel and petrol.

Srivastava, the right to food campaigner, said the other challenge in implementing the supreme court order was the technical problems involved. For the card to be used everywhere, all states must have electronic terminals, or EPOS machines, and the verifiable 12-digit identification number for the vast [biometric Aadhaar system](#) used in the machines have still not been fully rolled out.

[Hunger could kill millions more than Covid-19, warns Oxfam](#)
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Neeraj Shetye, of the Khaana Chahiye Foundation, which has distributed 6.2m meals to poor people in Mumbai and its outskirts since the first lockdown, says it backed Sawant's community kitchen as an experiment, to provide a livelihood for the female staff, who all come from the slum, as well as providing rent for the community kitchen, and for groceries for the meals.

“All of us who are working on hunger relief since the pandemic began can see that hunger persists,” he says. “The demand for our food distribution drives and ration kits never flagged.”

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Television & radio

Interview

Fiona Shaw: ‘I got to Hollywood at 28 and they said: You’re very old’

[Emine Saner](#)



‘Instead of saying “why me?” it’s “why not me?”’ ... Shaw, photographed in her garden. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

‘Instead of saying “why me?” it’s “why not me?”’ ... Shaw, photographed in her garden. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

The thrilling star of stage continues her TV takeover. As she joins mercilessly dark drama *Baptiste*, Shaw talks about *Fleabag*, American burnout – and marriage as a cure for chaos



[@eminesaner](#)

Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

There is a man outside, doing something to the windows of Fiona Shaw's house in London, and he appears to be following her from room to room. No sooner has she laughed, apologised, picked up her laptop (we're speaking on Zoom) and sought peace elsewhere than – scrape, tap – the top of a ladder appears again, and his face looms behind her.

No wonder. I feel like following Shaw around everywhere too. She is such fun, bracing company. She can swing from references to Freud to word-perfect renditions of Yeats lines learned in childhood, and makes some lovely observations: describing lunch with Phoebe Waller-Bridge, she says the Fleabag creator is "like April or May. She's blossoming on all fronts, all her fingers are light green." Even the man working on Shaw's windows is likened to something out of Rapunzel. She seems to delight in everything.

"I am as excited now as I was when I first left drama school and was having that marvellous time," says Shaw. She has long been regarded as one of the most exciting stage actors of her generation, but in recent years Shaw has created a thriving TV career. In [Killing Eve](#), she plays the ice-cool MI6

agent Carolyn Martens (she won a Bafta for it), and Waller-Bridge created the role of a therapist in the second series of Fleabag specially for her.

Shaw is in the second series of [Baptiste](#), the spin-off series about French detective Julien Baptiste (played by Tchéky Karyo), who was first seen in the 2014 BBC drama [The Missing](#). Shaw plays Emma Chambers, the British ambassador to Hungary. The character is similar to Carolyn, in that they're both self-contained, sharp and capable upper-middle-class English women (so brilliantly good at that is Shaw, that it feels strange to hear her talk in her smooth Irish accent). But, whereas Carolyn seems largely in control of her world, Emma is plunged into chaos after her husband and two sons go missing while they're all on a skiing holiday.



‘The show is pitiless’ ... with Tchéky Karyo in *Baptiste*. Photograph: Des Willie/BBC/Two Brothers Productions

Shaw liked that Emma “is not that good a parent. I think that’s good writing because it’s more interesting than [her being] a heroine. She’s a bit cold, a bit distanced and absorbed in work, and a little bit unknown by her children. Part of the emotional journey of it is that she discovers her own passion for her children. It’s not somebody standing in their powerful position, it’s the opposite, and that’s always good.”

The series flips between timelines, and by the end of the first episode, it's clear Emma has been pushed to breaking point. "There's irony, there's hindsight. A lot of it is about failure. In northern Europe, where we work terribly hard all the time, I'm not sure it's really about productivity, it's maybe more about puritanism, because other countries seem to get stuff done and live much gentler lives. Emma is one of those people who is nearly always 'on', her entrails knotted with tension. She sorts things out all the time and then can't sort [what happens to her family] out."

The Christian ethic dominates in the west: that if you do good things, good things happen – but it just isn't like that

I hesitate to bring it up, but there are inescapable similarities between Emma's loss in Baptiste and the trauma endured by Shaw's wife. [Sonali Deraniyagala](#), an economist, lost her entire family – her two sons, her husband and her parents – in the 2004 tsunami. The couple met after Shaw had read Deraniyagala's devastating memoir, [Wave](#).

Did Deraniyagala's unfathomable loss make Shaw think twice about taking on this part? "Yes," she says straight away. After a long pause, she speaks very carefully: "I'm being delicate, on Sonali's behalf. How can I explain it? I do live with somebody who has had huge tragedy in their life, perhaps the greatest tragedy of anybody [one has] ever met, really. So, of course, it's there, but ... one doesn't mine one's life in that way." And, she points out, "I think what happened to Sonali is worse."

There is grief, Shaw says, and then there is "catastrophic grief". "We're all going to have grief. But catastrophic grief has catastrophic effects on people. If Sonali teaches me anything, it is that the worst can happen. Instead of saying, 'why me?', it's 'why not me?' She was very concerned, during the worst of the pandemic, [about] people's cavalier belief that it wouldn't affect them. Doctors who were having to treat people who had been careless was a source of concern, because we shouldn't be putting anybody else in danger."

Fiction, Shaw says, "is there to throw a light on to darkness. What I like about the Baptiste series is that it is pitiless. I've always felt that the Greeks got that correct. The Christian ethic still dominates in the west – that if you

do good things then good things happen. But it just isn't like that, it is random and it is terrifying."



Acting royalty ... Shaw in the title role of Richard II, directed by Deborah Warner, at the National Theatre in 1995. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian

Shaw – charming and clever – would have made a good ambassador in real life. She has met quite a few, she says – Irish, mainly, since she is such a valued export and is regularly invited to things – and knows how tough it can be. “I think it’s a life of terrible disturbance. And I would have thought in the last two years, being a British ambassador in Europe must have been one of the most impossible jobs, where they have to at one minute be making allegiance with those countries, and then in the next, be dismantling the allegiance.” If a diplomat lives a peripatetic life, so does a working actor. “For a long time, I didn’t root myself,” says Shaw. “I was always away, and when I think back it makes me tired to think how ‘away’ I was.”

Shaw grew up in Cork, the second child of four, and the only girl. She loved poetry and would often win prizes for reciting it at school – “it was very empowering speaking language that was much bigger than myself,” she says. “My mother was such a huge personality at home that probably it was at school that I was more of a personality,” says Shaw, whose mother is now

in her 90s. “But we were always performing poems or quoting, there was good conversation at the table and everyone was reading, but not in a self-conscious way. There was also a lot of rugby.”

Her father, an ophthalmic consultant, insisted she go to university; she studied philosophy but kept acting. “We’d go to these festivals and I would show off a lot,” she says, laughing. “Dreadful 1960s plays but brilliant parts.” When she was 21, she moved to the UK to attend Rada, and then she was off – first to the National Theatre, then the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Around the same time, she started appearing in film, making *My Left Foot* and *Mountains on the Moon*. Then, she says, “I got to Hollywood and they said: ‘You’re very old.’ I remember thinking, ‘Shit, that’s bad.’” She was 28. Her next film, [Three Men and a Little Lady](#), in which she played a frumpy headteacher, “completely finished my film career,” she says, laughing.

It wasn’t a great hardship – she was cherished in theatre, which is where her passion was; the film world couldn’t see much past her comic turn as an English eccentric (though she returned, triumphant, as Petunia Dursley in the Harry Potter films). “I think maybe I also thought film was something to do with being pretty.” A raised eyebrow. “I mightn’t have been wrong, either. I didn’t want to go to that party where I wouldn’t be picked.” Their loss.



Triple triumph ... with Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Jodie Comer and their Baftas for *Killing Eve*, in 2019. Photograph: David Fisher/BAFTA/REX/Shutterstock

Shaw's theatre work included a long collaboration with the director [Deborah Warner](#) – notably, Shaw played Richard II, and performed some of the meatiest roles there are, such as Hedda Gabler and [Medea](#). In 2013, she was starring on Broadway in *The Testament of Mary*; she looked up and literally saw her name in lights. “I remember thinking that’s about as doiiinnng [she makes a gong-clashing sound] as you can get.” She smiles. “And feeling tired.”

A bit burnt out, she wanted “a new kind of challenge”, and started to direct operas, to more critical acclaim. Living a more settled life also allowed her to be available for television work, timed perfectly with the revolution that was happening in TV and the creation of better roles for older women. “Their function is not to be just mums,” says Shaw. “I’ve been sent some marvellous things from America recently, that I may or may not do, depending on whether we’re ever allowed to leave our country.” She is currently filming the Star Wars spin-off series *Obi-Wan Kenobi* for Disney+, and then there’s the final series of *Killing Eve*.

Pedro Almodóvar and Tilda Swinton: ‘I love the idea of the woman on the edge of the abyss’

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Shaw has had, she says, “a marvellous rejuvenation, both in ...” A short pause. “I don’t want to say the word ‘career’, because I don’t even think of it like that, but in adventure and in life.” She and Deraniyagala married in 2018. “My life with Sonali is so not what I expected, because I thought, [theatre] was my life and the price I paid for it was just to be in that,” she says. Deraniyagala teaches at Columbia University in New York, so the couple split their time between there, London, Ireland and Sri Lanka, where Deraniyagala was born.

Having never thought she’d get married, Shaw is now happily so. “It gets rid of a lot of possibilities,” she says, smiling. “I think I now realise that being unmarried, there’s always a cliff edge and you wonder when you’re going to fall off it. [Being married] I don’t feel any sense of chaos. I wonder whether I felt I needed the precariousness of possibility in order to act in the plays that I did.” She laughs. “That’s a rather pretentious way of saying something. I don’t know. But I’m very happy to relinquish it.”

- Baptiste is on BBC One on Sunday at 9pm.
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[The outspoken Syria](#)

Wafa Mustafa: the woman fighting to find her father – and all of Syria's disappeared



Wafa Mustafa ... ‘Losing my dad was like losing a part of my soul.’
Photograph: Clemens Bilan/EPA-EFE

Wafa Mustafa ... ‘Losing my dad was like losing a part of my soul.’
Photograph: Clemens Bilan/EPA-EFE

Ali Mustafa dreamed of seeing his beloved Syria freed from Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Then in 2013 he vanished, and his daughter has been searching for him ever since

[Annie Kelly](#)

Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Eight years ago, as pro-democracy protests raged on the streets of [Syria](#), Wafa Mustafa's father, Ali, was dragged from an apartment in Damascus by armed men and driven away. It was the last time he was seen or heard from. "In just a few moments, our family was obliterated," says Mustafa. "It was the end of our lives, and the beginning of another kind of existence altogether." Mustafa was 23. "So young, really, although I didn't feel like that at the time," she says.

Now 31, she has not talked to her father for nearly 3,000 days. "For me, losing my dad feels like losing a part of my soul," she says. "After he was taken from us, I realised that my whole life, everything, has been about trying to impress him or imitate him. He was this powerful, essential force. For years, without him, I didn't even know who I was."

The powerlessness of not knowing what has happened to Ali has been "like a kind of death", she says. "We have done everything we could. We have assigned lawyers, leveraged every connection of a connection. We've bribed, beaten down every door, but it has just been silence."

Mustafa's search for her father has come to dominate her life. She has become a relentless campaigner to free all of those who remain detained in Syria, fighting to ensure that the families left behind are not forgotten.

Since the Syrian revolution began in 2011, it is believed that more than 150,000 civilians have disappeared into detention centres or been tortured and killed by either the [Bashar al-Assad](#) regime or other armed groups in a conflict that has ripped millions of families apart.

"What we're going through is a story of collective tragedy," says Mustafa. "In Syria, I doubt there is a single family who has not had a loved one detained, kidnapped or disappeared. Whether those who were taken were for or against the revolution, it doesn't matter to me. I advocate for freedom for all."

Mustafa's family feel certain that those who dragged Ali away were acting on the orders of Assad's military regime. Ali was an outspoken critic of the regime and supporter of the Syrian revolution, which, in 2013 when he

disappeared, was looking as if it might have the momentum to overthrow the dictatorship.

“My father was living in a neighbourhood that was tightly controlled by the regime, but where there was a lot of support for the revolution and where there had been many arrests and kidnappings by government forces,” she says. “He was taken away with his best friend, whose family was told he had been killed under torture in a government detention facility.”



The last photograph of Mustafa with her father, taken days before his disappearance. Photograph: Courtesy of Wafa Mustafa

Mustafa’s family is from [Masyaf](#), a religiously and politically diverse city in north-west [Syria](#), three hours from Damascus. Before his disappearance, Ali had already been arrested, detained and tortured by the regime for his human rights activism and political beliefs.

“When he was detained, people would talk about him being in prison, but I was never ashamed,” Mustafa says. “I wanted people to know. I was proud of who he was.” Ali’s passion for politics and for freedom for Syria defined and shaped Mustafa’s childhood. “He was really a hero to us. When he was young, he was very handsome and intense. He had gone out to fight for the Palestinian cause,” she says. “I always had this very romantic idea of him

being like a Palestinian freedom fighter, very passionate in love and in fighting. He filled our house with music, politics and people.”

When she was growing up in [Masyaf](#), Mustafa would always tell people she wanted to be a war correspondent. “I mean, that was true, but only because I knew that would impress my dad. Really, all I wanted was to be just like him.”

Ali encouraged his three daughters to think for themselves – despite the fact that under the regime freedom of speech was curtailed. “There is this saying that we grew up with: ‘The walls have ears.’ Everyone was scared of that, but nothing was off-limits in our house. Neither my mother nor my father hid their political views from us. They wanted us to be free.”

Her father took her to her first demonstration when she was 10 – to protest about Palestine and the war in Iraq. At that time, the regime allowed people to blow off steam for what it considered to be safe political causes. “But, even then, I knew that, when we were chanting for freedom for Palestine, we were also calling for our own freedom,” says Mustafa.

When Egyptians started protesting in Tahrir Square at the beginning of the Arab spring in early 2011, Mustafa and Ali would take it in turns to do shifts in front of the TV news. When the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, resigned, it was the first time she saw her father cry.

“I think he understood what this meant for Syrians: that a revolution was coming,” she says. “When the protests started in Syria, he changed. He was very calm. He told me: ‘I had hoped my whole life that this would happen, but I never thought I would witness it. Even if I don’t get to see victory for the Syrian people, it is enough for me that I have been there at the beginning.’”

The revolution turned Mustafa from politics to activism. She was out on the streets protesting every day. Her mother was terrified, but when Mustafa was arrested – she spent weeks in a Syrian government prison where she was beaten and interrogated – her father continued to support her participation in the uprising.



Mustafa speaking to the UN from Berlin. Photograph: Clemens Bilan/EPA-EFE

“My mother supported me completely, but she was scared of what would happen to me at the protests, while my dad always said: ‘You have to do what you think is right.’ I think it takes a special kind of strength to see your children put themselves in danger for what they believe in, but support them with your whole heart.”

By 2013, as the conflict was escalating, one of Mustafa’s closest friends was killed in a shelling by regime forces in a civilian neighbourhood, and she fell apart. “I’d been protesting every day for two years. I’d been kicked out of school for my political beliefs, I’d been detained and terrorised. And then when I lost that person it just broke me.”

At this time, Mustafa was living in Damascus with Ali, as it had become too dangerous for him to remain in [Masyaf](#). “My dad was there with me and he nursed me, and got me through that really dark time. It was just the two of us. Without him, I wouldn’t have made it. A few months later, he was gone.”

On 2 July 2013, Mustafa’s mother, who had stayed with her youngest daughter in Masyaf, was on her way to Damascus to visit her husband after months of separation. “My mother and father had this epic love story. She

still has letters from him that she won't let us read. For them to be apart was really hard, but she was keeping everything together for my sister at home. Even though travel was very dangerous at that time, she decided to visit my father, and was only 15 minutes away from his apartment when she called him to say she was nearly there. When she reached the apartment, he was gone."

I will do this until I get the truth, even if it takes me the rest of my life.

Her father's arrest marked the end of Mustafa's life in her homeland. "I never thought I'd ever leave, I thought that I would always stay and fight for a fair and just Syria, but my dad always told us: 'If I am arrested, you must take your mother and your sister and get out because they will come for you all too.' So that's what we did. We left my father behind in Syria and we ran for our lives."

Taking nothing but their passports, Mustafa and her mother and youngest sister embarked on a terrifying escape, crossing over the border into Turkey under the cover of darkness. They lived there for three years as refugees, a period that Mustafa calls "the darkest of times".

"I was just so depressed and heartsick," she says. "In Turkey, I felt as if I were barely alive. I only got through it because I knew I had to look after my mother and my sister." She started documenting Islamic State (Isis) atrocities in Syria with the citizen journalism collective [Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently](#), which reported on human rights abuses by Isis and other forces occupying the northern Syrian city. [But, one by one, her colleagues in Turkey were assassinated by the terrorist group](#). Later, she worked for a Syrian radio station and as a reporter for the New Arab website.

In 2016, Mustafa was granted asylum in Germany and fled, leaving her family behind in Turkey. They have been separated ever since. Her mother and youngest sister are now in Canada, and her other sister is in the US. "Being separated from my mother is another hardship that is difficult to bear," she says.

Since she arrived in Berlin, a place of relative safety, Mustafa's life has been consumed by the search for her father. "It's become this daily existential crisis," she says. "I talk about him all day, every day, but haven't heard his voice for eight years. He's the first thing I think about in the morning. It's as if he's everywhere and nowhere at the same time.



Mustafa with a picture of her father ... 'He was really a hero to us.'
Photograph: Clemens Bilan/EPA-EFE

"Enforced disappearances, kidnappings, detention, it breaks the people who are left behind. It's a form of imprisonment in itself. You spend your life in this state of suspension, completely powerless with no way of moving forward."

Being interviewed over video from Berlin, Mustafa is impressive, eloquent, fiercely bright. It's easy to see how she is shaping up to be a ferocious campaigner. "I poured all my energy into fighting for a free and peaceful Syria," she says. "Now I am fighting for him."

Since 2016, while completing her education and working as a journalist, Mustafa has also worked with Families for Freedom, a campaigning group fighting for the release of the victims of forced disappearances.

Her activism has led to the plight of the families of the Syrian disappeared being debated at the highest political and diplomatic levels. In July 2020, she was asked to give a speech to the UN security council on forced disappearances as a war crime where she demanded the release of those still detained in Syria. “Which was a surreal experience because in the same meeting was Assad’s representative at the UN. I had to sit through his speech, and afterwards I was shaking. I thought: ‘OK, if I can get through that then I know I’m strong.’” Her campaigning has seen the issue of arbitrary detention covered extensively in the international media.

In April last year, Mustafa also held a one-woman vigil outside a courtroom in Koblenz, Germany, where two former senior Syrian military intelligence officers – Anwar Raslan and Eyad al-Gharib – were on trial in a high-profile case over alleged state-sponsored torture and murder at a Damascus detention centre. Mustafa sat alone among 121 photographs of missing people, including her father, who had been detained since the start of the Syrian uprising.

“It felt like a heavy burden because I was very alone, sitting there surrounded by all those photos of people I’d never met. But I also felt very strong because I was there representing all those families, letting everyone know that we wouldn’t be silenced, and we wouldn’t give up until we found them.”

She has become the public face of the search for the disappeared in Syria, and is constantly contacted by families looking for their loved ones. “It’s a huge responsibility because has my campaigning led to the release of my father? No. Has it led to the release of any other of the disappeared? No. But if I don’t scream and shout as loudly as I can about what has happened to 150,000 people, will anything ever change? We will just be forgotten. I won’t let that happen. I can show them that someone is out there fighting for them.”

It is inconceivable that she will ever stop trying to find out what happened to her father, she says. “It’s not like one day I’m ever going to wake up and forget he’s my father or find a way to make peace with the fact that he’s missing,” she says. “No. I will do this until I get the truth, even if it takes me the rest of my life.” She understands that she has been hardened and eroded

by the exhaustion of living through the pain of her father's absence day after day. "Some days, I look in the mirror and I don't recognise myself. I feel so old, even though I'm only 31."

The Guardian at 200.

I ask her if she believes her father is still alive. "Yes, I believe he is, with my whole heart," she says, with a determined shake of her head. She tells me that many people she knows were thought to be dead by their families only to be released and return home to them years later. "I have no evidence to the contrary. And, yes, maybe everything I'm doing is pointless, but I have no other option but to try."

Sometimes, she worries that her activism might be harming any prospect of her father's release. "But I know my dad wouldn't want me not to talk about it. I keep imagining him getting released and coming home and me having to explain how I sat there and did nothing for him and all the thousands of others like him. I'm doing this because this is what I want to do – but I'm sure that this is also what he wants me to do as well."

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[Hostels](#)

Yorkshire Dales on a budget: my peaceful little Swaledale cave



Grinton Lodge youth hostel is in a Grade II-listed building, complete with castellated tower

Grinton Lodge youth hostel is in a Grade II-listed building, complete with castellated tower

In the second of our new series, a YHA pod in a historic hostel is a cosy base for a 30-mile dale-hopping tour

Dixe Wills

Wed 14 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Some hostels cry out to be visited on the strength of their location alone. The little pink triangle that marks the position of [Grinton Lodge](#) on the OS map declares its magnificent isolation on the southern slopes of Swaledale in the [Yorkshire Dales national park](#). A footpath and bridleway shoot out from the hostel across Harkerside Moor, and the massive ridge above simply demands to be climbed on two wheels.

The bedrooms in the main building are not due to reopen until next Saturday (17 July), so I stayed in one of the hostel's five camping pods (there's also a bigger "Landpod", sleeping four). Tucked into a lofty copse of mature sycamores and conifers, the pods are sheltered from the vagaries of Dales weather. Impressively sheltered, in fact. I arrived sodden after an extremely damp cycle from [Darlington](#) (the nearest railway station, 23 miles away) and was beginning to regret having brought nothing on which to cook but a little twig-burning stove. I needn't have worried. The ground – and the sticks and fir cones scattered around it – was almost bone dry, despite the torrential rain. Repairing to the stone-built barbecue area that evening, I had no trouble getting a little fire going and soon had dinner bubbling away.



The camping pods at Grinton Lodge.

The grade II-listed hostel building – complete with castellated tower – was built as a shooting lodge in the early 19th century and converted into a youth hostel in 1948. The pods within its modest walled grounds are in the familiar "upturned boat" design (I'm 6ft 1in and didn't have to duck). The smaller pods have two single beds inside, while the larger ones like mine include an extra futon-level double at the end. Unusually for pods, bedding is provided, which lightens the load if you're getting here under your own steam. The mains sockets were useful for the little bit of charging I needed to do and would power the supplied electric heater on colder nights. Low-key

illumination, meanwhile, came courtesy of a couple of LED lights. All in all, it proved a snug and peaceful little cave to come back to after my adventures.



The writer takes a break on the summit above Askrigg.

And I only had to take a step out of the thicket for them to begin. Sumptuous views across Swaledale to the heights of Marrick Moor lured me out onto the hostel's own [Harkerside Moor](#). The sun showed itself at last and I wandered westward across the precipitous grassy slopes towards Maiden Castle, a neolithic fort. The hillside is strewn with ancient earthworks and a hut circle, and there's still an engagingly primitive feel to it today.

The following morning, I took my mountain bike off for a 30-mile dale-hopping tour. I say “my bike”, but it was my brother’s, kindly lent to me at the last minute when my own faithful steed died on me. “It’s about 20 years old,” he’d told me, “and not all that fancy.”

Below me lay Wensleydale – not so much a valley as a convenient meeting place for all the world’s shades of green

He failed to mention that the bottom gear was, well, not very *bottom-y*. The back-road climb from the [River Swale](#) up on to Whitaside Moor, Summer

Lodge Moor and then Askrigg Common starts gently enough but grinds remorselessly on for mile after mile until suddenly it gambols precipitously upward. It's not one to tackle on a bicycle built principally for coasting merrily downhill. The view from the top was quite something though. Below me in the sunshine lay Wensleydale – not so much a valley as a convenient meeting place for all the world's shades of green.

I dropped down to stone-built Askrigg to compile a picnic lunch from the cupboard-sized village store. Hauling myself back into Swaledale over the glorious Buttertubs Pass was the cue for more ravishing views of granite-formed hills and spurs. A section of the 12-mile, mostly offroad [Swale Trail](#) took me through fields and woods above the river. Passing through Reeth and its immense village green, I stopped for a much needed alfresco coffee and flapjack at the Dales Bike Centre in Fremington. Refuelled, I tackled the ascent to the hostel to collapse in a jelly-legged heap on my mercifully comfy bed.



The view of the village of Reeth from Grinton Lodge youth hostel.
Photograph: Dixie Wills

Current Covid measures include self-check-in, social distancing, time-slot shower booking (in spotless facilities that the youthful staff cleaned almost constantly) and, sadly, the closure of the guest kitchen. This all meant that

my stay was very different from the usual hostel experience. However, once the bedrooms are reopened I'm sure the customary buzz and bonhomie will return too. One of those bedrooms is really quite special: a penthouse honeymoon suite with its own freestanding rolltop bath. And, believe me, if you happen to go for a honeymoon spin over into Wensleydale and back, that bath will be very welcome.

Accommodation was provided by the [YHA](#). Pods sleep two, from £29 a night; private rooms (sleep two to six) from £29 (from £49 in July/August); Landpods (sleep four) from £39, campsite pitch £15,yha.org.uk/hostel/yha-grinton-lodge

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Heist review – Netflix cashes in with sexed-up crime spree extravaganza

Bourbon smugglers, ‘sex energy’ and a \$100m robbery inspired by CSI ... three audacious cons are examined in Netflix’s fun, trashy and titillating true-crime show



Rolling in it ... Emree Franklin as Heather Tallchief in Heist. Photograph: Netflix

Rolling in it ... Emree Franklin as Heather Tallchief in Heist. Photograph: Netflix



[Rebecca Nicholson](#)

Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Heist (Netflix) is a wildly entertaining collection of true-crime stories that falls firmly into “you couldn’t make it up” territory. In forensic detail, this debut season recalls three audacious robberies, using recreations, interviews with key players on both sides of the law and archive news footage. Each tale is split over two episodes, with one building up to the crime and the second detailing the sometimes painfully slow downfall of those involved. It is occasionally trashy – the first, in particular, goes to town on the reconstructions – sometimes funny, tense and exciting. In terms of taking sides, it can be playfully, cheekily on-the-fence. Crime never pays, it argues. Or does it?

The first instalment, Sex Magick Money Murder, is as outrageous and lurid as the title suggests. In the early 1990s, a young woman named Heather Tallchief is working as a nursing assistant, caring for young patients who are critically ill with Aids. Tallchief is from a tough background and develops a drug problem, going into what she refers to as “a downward spiral” at just 21. Enter a charismatic older man who promises to love her and take all her troubles away. Roberto Solis is a career criminal who operates under a raft of aliases. He is a poet with an interest in mysticism, the tarot and the power

of harnessing sex energy, all of which leads him towards that ultimate spiritual goal of stealing a truckload of cash.

Tallchief gets a job working for a security company that transports huge amounts of money away from casinos in Las Vegas. Her colleagues at the time joke that she was a terrible driver. She and Solis concoct and execute a daring heist, stealing \$3m using fake business signs, careful notes and a grey wig, among other crucial devices. The recreations are cheesy, but in the second episode it gets good, delving into the psychological ramifications of living a life constantly looking over one's shoulder and how the unravelling of years of deception usually comes from within.

If Tallchief's story of life on the run in the Caribbean and Amsterdam sounds as if it would lend itself to a classy TV adaptation, then the final instalment, *The Bourbon King*, deserves a Hollywood movie. It manages to pull together such disparate strands as a high-end bourbon-smuggling syndicate, the brand name Pappy Van Winkle and a recreational softball team, all under the watchful eye of Toby Curtsinger, who describes himself as "kinda like a mini Amazon" because he can get anything for anyone.

The best is the second story, *The Money Plane*, which gathers together a characterful cast of criminals to explain their roles in a near-perfect heist set in motion by a couple's fertility problems. Karls Monzon, a Cuban immigrant living in Miami, marries into a lively family described by a friend as "not bad-bad, just doing a lot of crazy shit". He and his new wife want a big family of their own, but have trouble conceiving, and she experiences two traumatic miscarriages. They decide to adopt a Russian baby, but it is prohibitively expensive. So Monzon assembles a gang of relatives and friends and decides to rob an airport hangar where, thanks to an inside man, they know there will be almost \$100m in cash. "I just wanted to steal enough money to adopt a child," Monzon claims, despite lining up enough money to adopt a small nation's worth.

Monzon is an eloquent man who paints himself as wholly dedicated to whatever skill he decides to explore, be it rollerskating or armed robbery. To plan the perfect crime, he immersed himself in US cop shows to work out how to evade the FBI. He lists the ones he watched: *CSI: Miami* and *Almost Got Away With It*, though the latter, surely, should have been a cautionary

tale. It all goes a bit meta here, as we're watching a show in which a man tells us which shows he watched to help commit a complex, risky heist.

There are certainly lessons to be taken from Heist itself, though perhaps not lessons that would favour aspiring criminals. The main one appears to be that no matter how daring the concept, no matter how big the payload, consciences weigh heavier than perpetrators expect. So, too, do banknotes, which are, in bulk, extremely heavy; millions of dollars cannot simply be thrown into carrier bags and spirited away. There is almost always an inside man, and almost always someone who cracks, who cannot bear the burden of life on the run, or life with a secret. Heist is cleverly told, keeping its many twists and turns in reserve until the moments when they will have the most impact, and it is a lot of fun.

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[Emmys](#)

Emmys 2021: The Crown and The Mandalorian lead nominations

Netflix drama and Disney+ adventure lead the way with an impressive showing for I May Destroy You and Mare of Easttown



Emma Corrin in The Crown. Photograph: Des Willie/AP

Emma Corrin in The Crown. Photograph: Des Willie/AP

[Benjamin Lee](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 12.38 EDT

The Crown and The Mandalorian have tied for the most Emmy nominations this year with 24 nods each.

The Netflix royal family drama, which has previously won 10 [Emmys](#), picked up nominations for stars Olivia Colman, Emma Corrin, Josh O'Connor, Gillian Anderson, Helena Bonham Carter, Tobias Menzies and Emerald Fennell. It was also nominated for best drama series.

[Emily in Paris but no Small Axe? This year's Emmys snubs and surprises](#)

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It was also a strong showing for Disney's acclaimed Star Wars spin-off The Mandalorian which, for a second year, saw an impressive amount of support from the [Television](#) Academy, including nods for best drama. Disney+ also saw success for their first Marvel show, WandaVision, which picked up 23 nominations, including for stars Elizabeth Olsen, Kathryn Hahn and Paul Bettany.

The Pose star MJ Rodriguez broke new ground by becoming the first transgender actor to receive a best actress nomination. Rodriguez is only the third ever trans performer to be nominated in any acting category, following in the footsteps of Rain Valdez and Laverne Cox. She will face off in the drama category against Elisabeth Moss for The Handmaid's Tale, Uzo Aduba for In Treatment, Jurnee Smollett for Lovecraft Country and The Crown stars Colman and Corrin.

For the first time in Emmys history, actors of colour comprise at least half of the lead drama categories. Overall, white actors occupy 56.3% of the 96 total acting nominations.

Michaela Coel's acclaimed BBC series [I May Destroy You](#) was also recognised in multiple categories, including best limited or anthology series and best actress in a limited or anthology series. Overall it scored nine nominations. The series recently picked up two Baftas for best mini-series and best leading actress.



Michaela Coel in *I May Destroy You*. Photograph: AP

Other British stars who picked up nominations included Hugh Grant for *The Undoing*, Ewan McGregor for *Halston* and O-T Fagbenle for *The Handmaid's Tale*. Bridgerton's breakout star Regé-Jean Page was also nominated for best actor in a drama with the Netflix period drama scoring 12 nominations overall.

In its first year, Apple's sleeper hit *Ted Lasso* received 20 nominations, including best comedy and best actor in a comedy for star Jason Sudeikis. It faces off in the comedy category against *Black-ish*, *Emily in Paris*, *The Flight Attendant*, *The Kominsky Method*, *Hacks* and *Pen15*.

[Mare of Easttown finale review – Kate Winslet drama is a stunning, harrowing success](#)

[Read more](#)

The first, and only, season of HBO's dark mystery *Mare of Easttown* was also a big draw for voters, picking up 16 nominations, including for star [Kate Winslet](#). It will face off in the category of best limited or anthology series alongside Netflix's hit chess drama *The Queen's Gambit*, which picked up 18 nominations, including for star Anya-Taylor Joy.

The drama category saw a surprise showing for Amazon's dark superhero series *The Boys* which was joined by other first-time shows *Bridgerton* and *Lovecraft Country*. They joined *The Crown*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Mandalorian*, *Pose* and *This is Us*.

It was HBO and HBO Max who led the way with 130 nominations in total, followed closely by Netflix with 129 and then Disney+ with 71.

The most notable snubs this year include Nicole Kidman for her performance in HBO's thriller series *The Undoing*, buzzy Peacock comedy series *Girls5Eva*, Ted Danson's performance in NBC comedy *Mr Mayor* and, most surprisingly, Steve McQueen's universally acclaimed BBC/Amazon series *Small Axe* which failed to score a single nomination.

The ceremony is set to take place on 19 September with Cedric the Entertainer hosting. Earlier this week it was announced that there will be "a limited audience of nominees and their guests" in attendance.

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Rivers

Livestreamed documentary Rivercide to unmask UK's water polluters

George Monbiot hosts innovative investigation naming the farms and water firms damaging Britain's rivers



George Monbiot will be filmed travelling along the Wye in a documentary broadcast live online on Wednesday 14 July. Photograph: YouTube

George Monbiot will be filmed travelling along the Wye in a documentary broadcast live online on Wednesday 14 July. Photograph: YouTube

[Tom Wall](#)

Wed 14 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Giant livestock farms and privatised water firms accused of polluting the nation's waterways are to be named in what is thought to be the world's first livestreamed investigative documentary.

The crowdfunded investigation Rivercide, which [will be broadcast online at 7pm on Wednesday](#), will be hosted by environmental journalist and

Guardian columnist [George Monbiot](#). Monbiot will travel along the River Wye, which flows between England and Wales, to collect water samples that will be analysed as the documentary unfolds.

“This is a really shocking story of how our rivers are being devastated,” said Monbiot. “We’ll be revealing some serious wrongdoing.”



The River Wye from Symonds Yat Rock. Its idyllic appearance belies the fact that parts of it have become heavily polluted. Photograph: David Broadbent/Alamy

The broadcast will also link to locations in Yorkshire and the east of England with similar problems.

The documentary comes as concern grows about the scale of human and animal waste washing into rivers and seas. Just 14% of English rivers are classed as being in a healthy condition, with sewage releases accounting for 36% of the damage to waterways, and runoff from agricultural industries responsible for 40%.

Last week Southern Water was [fined](#) a record £90m for knowingly dumping billions of litres of raw sewage over several years.

[Analysis](#) suggests only a tiny proportion of illegal discharges ever leads to a prosecution and the Environment Agency, which monitors river pollution, has [lost nearly two-thirds of its budget](#) since 2010.

“A huge part of what we’re looking at is the total failure of government. I don’t just mean the Westminster government – I mean all four nations,” said Monbiot. “There’s been a slashing of monitoring and enforcement to the point of which you can get away with anything.”



Franny Armstrong, the director of Rivercide. ‘Just a few of us can make something which can be watched globally for free. It was irresistible.’
Photograph: YouTube

The live documentary is being directed by [Franny Armstrong](#), known for her films Age of Stupid and McLibel, on a budget of just £70,000.

“It used to be that only mega-corporations could make a live event, with outside broadcast trucks and hundreds of thousands of pounds,” said Armstrong. “But mobile phone streaming technology means that just a few of us can make something which can be watched globally for free. It was too irresistible not to try.”

Armstrong believes the live broadcast brings a sense of risk to environmental film-making, which can sometimes make for grim, serious

viewing. “This format has got an added element of jeopardy, which will make it a hell of a lot more fun to watch,” she said. “People are going to be wondering ‘is George about to fall off that boat?’ or ‘is the live stream going to go down?’ It has a Challenge Anneka feel to it.”

Monbiot will be joined by singer Charlotte Church and poet Owen Sheers, who have composed an original song for the broadcast. Poet [Benjamin Zephaniah](#) will also perform.

The production team did not approach traditional broadcasters about the live stream. “Even if you somehow got through the commissioning editors, it would just have been killed by officialdom,” said Monbiot. “The big broadcasters have become much more cautious. When I started at the BBC in the 1980s, there was a real excitement about journalism. But the sense that you could do anything bold and dangerous has completely gone.”

Monbiot decided to focus on the River Wye after a disturbing canoeing trip last summer. He found the Wye, which was once prized for its salmon, had changed beyond all recognition over the course of a decade. “There hadn’t been any rain so it should have been crystal clear but you couldn’t see anything,” he said. “I made the mistake of going swimming. As soon as my nostrils got near the water I nearly gagged because it was so disgusting. When I got out, my whole body felt like it was coated in slimy snot. It was like something out of a 1970s science fiction film.”

“Rivers are the life support system on which all life depends but we are literally pouring shit into them,” said Armstrong. “In a civilised society, and the sixth richest country in the world, you’d think keeping water clean would be job number one? But this government [can’t even do that](#).”

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Movies

It's time to stop making movies about Ted Bundy

Adrian Horton

The trailer for American Boogeyman, yet another film to cast a handsome actor as a serial killer, faces backlash. Who is asking for more Bundy content?



Chad Michael Murray in American Boogeyman Photograph: YouTube

Chad Michael Murray in American Boogeyman Photograph: YouTube

Tue 13 Jul 2021 16.43 EDT

Ted Bundy, the serial killer convicted of murdering more than 30 women in the 1970s who probably killed upwards of 100 whose names receive little attention, once mused, in interviews on death row, that he hoped his story would sell. Thirty-two years after his death by electric chair, Bundy seems to have been prescient about a curiosity with the mild-looking sociopath. The past couple years has seen a veritable “Bundy binge” in true crime content: a

two-hour Oxygen special, too many podcasts to list, the Netflix docuseries [Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes](#) and the biopic [Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile](#), starring [Zac Efron](#) as a suave Bundy.

[Just another pretty face: should Hollywood stop giving bad guys a face-lift?](#)
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Despite significant pushback to the glamorization of Bundy as an object of fascination that distracts from his victims, the train keeps rolling; over the weekend, the trailer dropped for American Boogeyman, directed by Daniel Farrands and starring One Tree Hill's Chad Michael Murray as Bundy. The film will premiere this August – the same month as Amber Sealey's No Man of God, starring The Marvelous Mrs Maisel's Luke Kirby as Bundy and Elijah Wood as the deeply religious FBI agent who interviewed him on death row.

Both films are two more projects to cast handsome Hollywood actors (albeit, in Murray's case, one a decade-plus removed from peak teen soap fame) as Facetuned versions of the real killer, whose fascination derived in part from a ravenous, terrified press cycle focused on his “attractiveness” (for a serial killer; Bundy is by no means Hollywood handsome). And American Boogeyman specifically presents another queasy example of feeding into the allure that prompts people to make “[Ted Bundy is hot](#)” the worst incantation of the internet boyfriend (which, in turn, draws more attention to Netflix's projects). Who is asking for more Bundy content?

The world if we stopped making Ted Bundy movies.
pic.twitter.com/w5gSVEJlju

— Tyler Durden (@iconiccfork) [July 13, 2021](#)

Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile, directed by Joe Berlinger (who also helmed Conversations with a Killer, featuring extensive audio of Bundy's death row interviews) was nominally told through the eyes of Bundy's longtime girlfriend Liz Kloepfer (Lily Collins), whose book provided the basis of the film. Likewise, American Boogeyman is allegedly about the “untold” story of the FBI agent and manhunt to capture Bundy.

But judging by American Boogeyman's trailer – Murray as Bundy luring a woman in his car, Murray beside with a knife above his head – the film appears to appeal to the most base interest in Bundy: his monstrosity, embodied as a handsome, abstract character rather than a real person who took real lives.

Online backlash to American Boogeyman's trailer, however contained to the Twitter bubble, may suggest a growing distaste in projects which appeal to this curdled strain of true crime, the [worst kind of voyeurism](#). Reaction to the trailer has been almost uniformly negative, with a predominant sentiment of déjà vu. Haven't we been through this before? Yes, in 2019 with Netflix's two Bundy projects; yes, every time an attractive Hollywood actor takes on the role of a real-life killer. Yes, to a point, earlier this year, when Evan Peters, of American Horror Story and Mare of Easttown fame, was [announced](#) as the pick to play notorious killer/cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer in Ryan Murphy's upcoming Netflix limited series Monster.



Zac Efron in *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*. Photograph: Brian Douglas/AP

There are examples of nuanced true crime entries which redirect voyeurism and the inherent pull of mystery onto [systemic flaws](#) that are just as shocking, if not as lurid, from the prevalence of wrongful conviction in

Netflix's [The Innocence Files](#) to the fallibility of drug evidence labs in [How to Fix a Drug Scandal](#). Serial, the podcast that arguably turbocharged the true crime boom, moved in later seasons from the singular case of Hae Min Lee's murder and Adnan Syed's controversial conviction to the legal system itself – its [third season](#) embedded in the justice center in Cleveland, Ohio for a year. Mindhunter, the Netflix psychological crime series based on a 1995 book about the FBI's serial crime unit, demonstrated that gripping true crime television could plumb the psychological mysteries of sadism without fixating solely on the killers.

[Forget Tiger King: Netflix's broken criminal justice docs are just as shocking](#)
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It's yet to be seen how Murphy's Monster handles Dahmer; the series promises to focus largely on systemic issues – investigators slow off the mark to suspect an affable seeming white guy, with Niecy Nash in the role of the suspicious neighbor dismissed by police – that allowed Dahmer to prey for so long. The same is true for No Man of God, whose director [drew a rebuke](#) from Berlinger for criticizing past Bundy projects which “glorify” the killer.

“They make him out to be a male model – so smart, so charismatic, a master of disguise,” Sealey told [Refinery29](#). “I don't see that. When I look at him and I watch interviews and I listen to the tapes, I see a deeply insecure, needy – almost like an incel – kind of guy who just wants accolades and wants people to tell him how great he is.”

Intent aside, Bundy remains the main character. The “Bundy binge” seems to, at best, hold to the belief that re-laundering the lurid details of his predation through entertainment might somehow wring out some explanation for unfathomable human evil. In an interview with [Variety](#), Wood spoke to that fascination directly. “Bundy, more than any other mass murderer, serial killer or disturbed individual, managed to live a relatively successful double life,” he said. “For many of us, it's easy to separate ourselves from the monsters because we can't relate to them. But we're more fascinated by the killer who is seemingly more like us.”

While there does appear to be an escalating backlash to projects which figure the killer over anyone else, it's unlikely that our obsession with serial killers will fully evaporate. Black holes of explanation will continue to draw an audience seeking meaning, a foray into the forbidden. And there will be film and television, with handsome leads glossing up a horrific story, dressing voyeurism as depth.

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Euro 2020

'I'm so incredibly proud of this team': readers celebrate the Three Lions squad

Guardian readers applaud the England football team's 'dignity and decency' and the joy they brought throughout Euro 2020



England players celebrate as goalkeeper Jordan Pickford makes a save in the penalty shootout of their Euro 2020 final match against Italy. Photograph: Alex Morton/UEFA/Getty Images

England players celebrate as goalkeeper Jordan Pickford makes a save in the penalty shootout of their Euro 2020 final match against Italy. Photograph: Alex Morton/UEFA/Getty Images

Jedidajah Otte

Tue 13 Jul 2021 15.24 EDT

Eight Guardian readers and England fans reflect on their personal highlights from the tournament, and what they celebrate most about this Three Lions squad.

‘They aren’t afraid to speak up’



Jack: ‘hopeful’. Photograph: GuardianWitness

“I was most happy with the way this young team presented themselves on and off the pitch. Their world is highly managed, scripted, controlled – but they are all genuinely nice guys and absurdly talented. I feel there is a

genuineness of youth these guys possess – guided by older heads and Saint Gareth, of course.

“They aren’t afraid to speak up and get behind social causes, beyond just football. This takes bravery. These aren’t political players, they are just people with a social conscience.

“They worked amazingly hard as a team. They ran and ran and ran. They won and lost together. This is an England team that for the first time I can ever remember will work their socks off not just for nation, result or glory, but in order to not let each other down.

“I’m so incredibly proud of this team – I’m sad, but I’m hopeful.” **Jack, 43, father of two and Derby fan, Weybridge**

‘The players should all be proud of themselves’



Lesley Harris: comfort in the team’s performance. Photograph: GuardianWitness

“I asked my year five class what the tournament meant to them. The children all wanted England to lift the trophy, but had so many other good things to say.

“They said the players should all be really proud of themselves, and have used the team as inspiration when thinking about resilience and perseverance. They were also very much in support of the younger players taking the penalties.

“We feel as though the team has helped galvanise a fractured nation, in the wake of the damage done by Covid. Their success has reconnected us and put a smile on a lot of faces. Thank you.” **Lesley Harris, 52, primary school teacher, Nottinghamshire**

‘They set an excellent example for the young fans’



David Farrow: ‘good, clean football’. Photograph: GuardianWitness

“This team are more structured and more coherent in their approach than any I can recall before. They work together, for each other and with each other. They play good, clean football that is entertaining to watch. Off the pitch they behave impeccably, are a credit to their profession and set an excellent example for the young fans who idolise them.

“The experienced players charged with mentoring and bringing out the best in the younger players took their role so seriously. I also celebrate the diversity within the team. The abuse the black players have received from

some quarters is, frankly, utterly disgusting. No one should be subjected to such behaviour, ever, under any circumstances.” **David Farrow, 59, Milton Keynes**

‘It brought so many of us together’



Raquel Douglas: ‘so beautiful’. Photograph: GuardianWitness

“I have never supported England before, but I did this time, from the start to the final. I wanted to get behind this group of boys, it was so beautiful. The squad demonstrated passion, and it brought so many of us together, as a family and as a country.

“I was touched by their resilience and commitment to being inclusive despite the fact that some ignorant individuals are trying to tarnish all their hard work. I love football but understand that until we can eradicate racism totally from the game, it will constantly keep people from enjoying the game and labelling it as a racist sport.

“I’m all about change, and this team was about change.” **Raquel Douglas, 52, local government project manager, Lambeth, London**

‘They have united most of the country’

“Highlights for me were obviously the performances on the pitch, and more generally the dignity and decency the whole team have conducted themselves with. The leadership and social conscience they have shown – not just during the tournament – the Dear England letter from Gareth Southgate, taking the knee and standing against racism and promoting diversity and inclusion. They have united most of the country, which our leaders have done so much to divide.

“I particularly applaud Sancho, Rashford and Saka for having the guts to step up and take a penalty when they knew what would follow from cowardly racists if things went the way they eventually did.” **Neil Adams, 55, Wigan**

‘Thank you to the team for bringing us pure joy’



Avielle Breen: ‘glee and excitement’. Photograph: GuardianWitness

“What moves me so much about this team is how much glee and excitement they have brought my friends and I over these past few weeks.

“The most memorable and precious moment for me was the night of the semi-final. Brighton was bursting at the seams with joy and cheers in the

streets, it felt like our victory. And for now, that is enough to keep us going despite not having won the whole thing.

“I hope everyone on the England squad, and Gareth Southgate, feels proud of themselves. Thank you for taking the knee, for wearing the Pride captain band, and for giving us the best gift we could have asked for: pure childlike joy and happiness after the hardest year of our lives.” **Avielle Breen, 28, works in digital marketing, Brighton**

‘I love having a team that makes us proud off the pitch’

“I have been an England fan for a long time and went to both the 2014 and 2018 World Cups to watch them. I love having a team that makes us proud off the pitch. What people like Sterling, Rashford and Henderson have done for important causes is miles more important than what they do on the pitch. They make me proud to be English, which contrasts strongly with the behaviour of some of our fans.

“The fact we have a team made up of players as thoughtful and empathic as ours, the fact they kneeled for the whole tournament and never flinched in their commitment to doing something they believed in, is brilliant.” **Jozef Brodala, 28, works for a startup, Gothenburg**

‘I loved the obvious bond of respect and care’



Jackie Curtis: ‘moved’. Photograph: GuardianWitness

“I was moved that the team took the knee – and continued to do it even after all the disgraceful booing and the criticism. Because it was right, and they kept on doing the right thing. I also loved the obvious bond of respect and care between the team and Gareth Southgate – when they huddled for a team talk, every pair of eyes was on him, and his fatherly hugs to the defeated players at the final touched me deeply.” **Jackie Curtis, 57, nursery owner, Whitley Bay**

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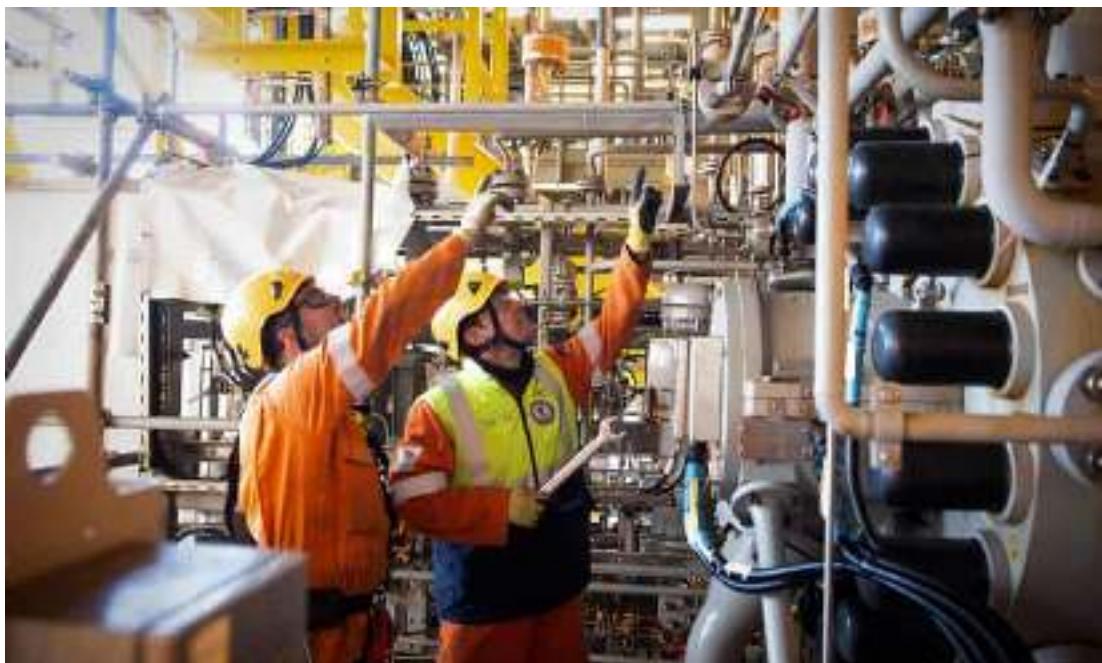
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People in the UK want bold climate action – why aren't politicians listening?

[Carys Roberts](#)

Across the country, citizens' juries have shown strong support for ambitious green policies that improve lives



Workers on an oil platform in the North Sea, east of Aberdeen. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Workers on an oil platform in the North Sea, east of Aberdeen. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Wed 14 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

The fight against climate change is often presented as a binary decision between a costly but sustainable future or missing environmental targets while protecting people's jobs. Not only is this framing environmentally dangerous, it's politically unnecessary. There is strong support for ambitious [government policy](#) to tackle the climate crisis, and optimism about the positive benefits of doing so, as long as the measures taken are fair.

The [IPPR Environmental Justice Commission](#), which publishes its final blueprint for a fair transition today, has seen this first-hand from hundreds of hours of conversations with citizens across the UK. Over the past 18 months, we have convened “citizens’ juries”, where people from different areas are randomly invited to take part in a series of events, to hear from experts and discuss and propose their own ideas. We spoke with people from all walks of life and different viewpoints in Aberdeenshire, Tees Valley and County Durham, Thurrock and south Wales. In each place, we asked these jurors what a fair transition would look like to them.

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Our findings were clear and arresting. Jurors are concerned the UK government is acting too slowly, and wants it to move faster. They know that addressing the climate crisis will require the whole of society, including businesses, to get involved, and they want government to show real leadership in driving this. They recognise the challenges we face but are overwhelmingly optimistic about what a greener, fairer future for the country could look like, from more good jobs to flourishing local wildlife, access to nature and revitalised neighbourhoods and communities.

Most jurors felt strongly that communities and local areas should have more of a say in *how* this transition takes place. They were clear there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and people should be able to shape their areas, with local government afforded the power and resources to lead the way. The juries were clear that the transition must be fair: those who are set to lose out should be protected, while those least able to pay should not bear the brunt of the costs.

In Thurrock, Charles told us that [decarbonising homes](#) through measures such as installing insulation could be a “win-win” for both the environment and families, who would benefit from lower heating bills. In order to make the best choice, people need access to information about the options and benefits. The government will need to meet those who can’t afford to pay upfront costs halfway. The commission therefore proposes the “GreenGo” scheme, a one-stop shop offering advice and financial support to help

households upgrade home insulation and switch to greener heating and transport.

In Aberdeenshire, Caitlin told us how reliant the community is on the [oil and gas industry](#). Her father is one of the [10% of people](#) in Aberdeenshire or Aberdeen city who work in oil and gas. Despite this, she was clear that the transition away from fossil fuels does need to happen. This will mean applying a “forceful hand” to businesses that face little incentive to switch to renewable activities. Workers in the industry, particularly those who are older and may be more fearful of change, will need support, including retraining opportunities. This will enable them to make the most of their many transferable skills that could be applied to new, green industries – such as peatland restoration. In recognition of these challenges, the commission proposes a new “right to retrain” for workers in industries that will need to change – with proper funding attached.

Katie in south Wales told us that it’s really hard for people in the valleys to get around without a car. Even if the UK does successfully transition to [electric vehicles](#), there will still be too many vehicles on the road, clogging up neighbourhoods. And not everyone will be able to afford an electric car. Katie told us she wants to see it become much easier to get around without a car, with options such as cycle paths and places to hire bikes and scooters. Providing alternative methods of transport will be key to moving away from polluting and space-consuming cars; the IPPR is calling for free local public transport by 2030.

Our juries spent hours hearing different perspectives and discussing a path forward, with many telling us that being part of this process made them more likely to take action on the climate and nature emergencies and left them feeling more optimistic about the future. Not everyone can take part in a citizens’ jury, but polling shows that the message we heard from the jurors is reflected across the population more generally. Around two-thirds of people in the UK want the government to be doing more – and also [spending more](#) – on environmental issues.

Support for an ambitious green agenda is widespread, if it improves lives. Rather than staving off the worst, people are optimistic that by working together, the UK can seize the opportunity to build a greener, fairer future

that includes those who are currently locked out of our economy and those who will be affected by future change. Politicians looking for a popular, green agenda would do well to listen to their insights.

- Carys Roberts is executive director of the Institute for Public Policy Research
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The most surprisingly contentious subject? Toilet roll orientation

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



Under or over is clearly utterly unimportant, yet the choice has inspired an extensive Wikipedia entry, viral videos and record-breaking outcries



According to Dr Gilda Carle: ‘People who roll over are more dominant than those who roll under.’ Photograph: Peter Dazeley/Getty Images

According to Dr Gilda Carle: ‘People who roll over are more dominant than those who roll under.’ Photograph: Peter Dazeley/Getty Images

Wed 14 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Behold the very small, very insignificant hill that I am willing to die on: toilet paper should always hang *over* the top of the roll rather than under it. Whenever I come across a toilet roll that does not conform to this orientation I feel strangely irritated and get an almost overwhelming urge to fix the damn thing.

I do not feel like a complete loo-ser admitting to this pet peeve in public because, guess what? There’s a decent chance you have strong feelings about toilet paper too. It’s a surprisingly fraught issue: there’s even a dedicated Wikipedia entry on “[toilet paper orientation](#)” that is more than 2,000 words long and contains 66 footnotes. When the writer of the popular “Ann Landers” [advice column](#) was asked her opinion on the subject in 1986, she replied “under” – an assertion so controversial that it generated a record-breaking [15,000 letters](#) in response, along with several follow-up columns. “Would you believe I got more letters on the toilet paper issue than on the Persian Gulf war?” Landers (a pen name) [complained](#) in a 1992 column.

Landers' opinion on the subject, to be clear, is very much the minority view. Surveys demonstrate that most people are very much Team Over – including Oprah Winfrey. Illustrations from a toilet paper roll patent registered in 1891 also suggest over is the correct orientation. And if that doesn't persuade you to change the way you roll, may I direct you to a Toilet Paper Personality Test developed by a relationship expert called Dr Gilda Carle. According to Carle, "People who roll over are more dominant than those who roll under."

While those on Team Under may be more submissive, they could be more marketing-savvy. Earlier this year, a TikToker went viral by claiming that toilet paper manufacturers have tricked the masses into favouring the over orientation because it results in "30% more toilet paper" being used. While the video has had more than a million likes, it contained zero citations, so I have no idea whether it's credible or not. But now this is out of my system, it's time to start working on my next column: a treatise on how, if you put your ketchup in the cupboard instead of the fridge, there is something deeply wrong with you.

Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist.

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What if the worst people in the world said they all wanted to go into space

[First Dog on the Moon](#)



They are flying with money from taxpayers and/or money that should have been paid as tax! Billionaires should not exist

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[OpinionEuro 2020](#)

Footballers can say it, but for England's politicians, 'sorry' really is the hardest word

[Marina Hyde](#)



The emotional maturity of the Euro 2020 players is in stark contrast to that of the prime minister and government



Marcus Rashford after failing to score in the penalty shootout during the Euro 2020 final at Wembley. Photograph: John Sibley/AFP/Getty Images

Marcus Rashford after failing to score in the penalty shootout during the Euro 2020 final at Wembley. Photograph: John Sibley/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 13 Jul 2021 10.40 EDT

These days English people expect more from our football team than our government. Which is a funny old switcheroo, when you think about it. My apologies to the other home nations for making the “we” of this particular article the English – but All This is very much an English problem, and there’s no point kidding ourselves about that.

England Expects That Every Footballer Will Do His Duty. For the players, faultless competence is that duty, and – if it is not delivered – public apologies and contrition are in order from those who failed. And very promptly indeed. It’s not like we kick it down the road to a public inquiry that reports in two tournaments’ time. Since Sunday night, despite many being deluged by racist abuse, we have seen England stars break cover to

apologise for their mistakes, for letting fans down, for not being quite enough in the moment.

It is, of course, a fundamental tenet of sporting greatness that reckoning with failure makes you stronger, that the mistake or the falling-short is not the defining moment. Rather, it is how you respond to it: first by owning up to it, then by learning from it, and folding it back into your story so you come back stronger. Gareth Southgate knows that journey of old; he was beginning it again in the immediate aftermath of the final, fronting up to the nation to insist that failure “totally rests with me”.

[Manchester shows support for Marcus Rashford: ‘It’s evolved into something special’](#)

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These are the lessons you might want to teach your children. That having been brave in the first place is ultimately more important than having failed in the moment, even if it doesn’t feel that way at the time. That facing up to things is hard, but right and helpful for the future. And maybe that saying sorry even when it really isn’t necessary can be a decent and humble gesture.

Children hear these messages so often from people who want the best for them that many of them already know they are the right things to say. After his own [letter](#) to fans, Marcus Rashford posted some of those he has [received from children](#) since Sunday’s defeat, and they themselves make for extraordinarily humbling and emotional reading.

Where is any of this in our politics, I wonder? There is something completely antithetical to modern political culture in it all. It is, on every level, absurd that it should feel socially necessary for footballers barely out of their teens to pen missives to the nation apologising for missing a penalty, but not for a government to even acknowledge vast and lethal mistakes, much less say sorry for them.

For much of the past 16 months the government has seemed so hell bent on learning nothing that the same terrible errors are repeated twice and more, by exactly the same people. These mistakes – these “misses”, if you will – have led to thousands upon thousands of avoidable deaths. They have led to

far longer lockdowns than would otherwise have been necessary, to the far longer removal of people's basic freedoms, and to the all attendant mental and financial misery that comes with that, to say nothing of the pressures placed on the NHS, now dealing with [mindblowing backlogs](#) in treatment and surgeries.

Is yet another avoidable foul-up in the offing, even as the government enlivened the football hangover by confirming it was fully opening up for its "freedom day", with its own ministers briefing that they were "flying blind". You certainly wouldn't bet against it. Yet at no point in any of this has Boris Johnson offered a single apology, much less a sincere one in which specific failures are faced up to and responsibility "[totally rests with me](#)". Perhaps that's why the government doesn't "grow" as a set of players, much less feel like the type of people we would hold up as role models to children.

As you're supposed to learn from early childhood, it is a mark of weakness never to apologise or own up. Even when she was found to have bullied her staff, Priti Patel [couldn't say a proper sorry](#). So it's no surprise to find her refusing to reconsider her statement that people had a right to boo players taking the knee – despite, as Tyrone Mings has now so [arrestingly put it to her](#), "the very thing we are campaigning against" is happening to the players in the wake of defeat. If only Patel or Johnson were a strong enough character to say "you know what, I got that wrong. I'm sorry, my eye was off the ball at the time but I think given what's happened since, we can all see what these players face." It's really not that hard. Everyone can make mistakes – even politicians.

Yet in his serial refusal to take responsibility for his past statements – or even concede he ever really made them – Johnson seems to have rather more in common with the sort of guy who claims their social media account has been hacked. (Amazing what hackers get up to these days. The big prize seems to be gaining control of some random guy's Twitter for a single hour after a football game, or hacking a male public figure's account to send a single picture of his penis.)

England Expects ... what, honestly? England expects no one to take responsibility. England expects less than what it deserves. As long as we're ruled by people who regard self-examination and the odd sorry as a sign of

weakness as opposed to a sign of strength, we will continue to be let down and short-changed by what they deliver. Taking responsibility should be for politicians as well as footballers – otherwise the country can expect plenty more years of hurt.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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Why are England's water companies pumping out a tide of sewage? Because they can

[George Monbiot](#)



Fines are treated as a business cost, the Environment Agency is toothless – the whole thing stinks



Joss Bay in Broadstairs, Kent, July 2020. Photograph: Dylan Martinez/Reuters

Joss Bay in Broadstairs, Kent, July 2020. Photograph: Dylan Martinez/Reuters

Tue 13 Jul 2021 11.40 EDT

What's remarkable is not that a water company knowingly and deliberately poured billions of litres of raw sewage into the sea to cut its costs. What's remarkable is that the Environment Agency investigated and prosecuted it. Every day, water companies [pour tonnes of unprocessed filth](#) into England's rivers and seas, and the government does nothing.

Even in the wake of the sentence last week, under which Southern Water was [fined £90m](#), the company's own [maps](#) show a continued flow of raw filth into coastal waters. Same shit, different day. The only occasions on which water companies are allowed by law to release raw sewage are when "[exceptional rainfall](#)" overwhelms their treatment works. But the crap keeps coming, rain or no rain.

The prosecution, in this land of lions led by donkeys, was driven above all by one official at the Environment Agency, Stephen Bailey, who managed to stick with the case, [breaking through layers of water industry deception](#) and

raising, within his organisation, a stink about the stink. Even so, though this was a deliberate and long-lasting crime, though “very serious widespread criminality” was established, though Southern Water obstructed the investigation, no executive is being prosecuted. The fine will be swallowed by its gigantic profits like a stone thrown into a settling tank.

[Southern Water fined record £90m for deliberately pouring sewage into sea](#)
[Read more](#)

As the court documents show, the company knew it ran the risk of big fines, but calculated that they would cost less than upgrading its plants and treating the sewage. Even now, this calculation may have been vindicated. Hiding its discharges saved it more than £90m in penalties, even before the huge savings it made by failing to upgrade its infrastructure are taken into account. So while the £90m fine and the £126m penalty imposed by the Water Services Regulation Authority, Ofwat, were heralded as “massive” and explained as “deterrents”, I don’t see them as either. The occasional prosecution, which holds an amorphous thing called the corporation – rather than any human being – liable, seems to be treated by water companies as a business cost.

The truth is that the governments of all four nations have lost control of the pollution crisis, and in some cases this seems to be, like Southern Water’s releases, knowing and deliberate. Since 2010, the Westminster government has cut the Environment Agency’s grant by almost two-thirds. It knew the budget was already stretched. It knew the water companies and other polluters were already getting away with murder, but it went ahead anyway. When you look into your local river and see, instead of sparkling water and leaping fish, stools and wet wipes, sanitary towels and sewage fungus, please remember that this is what “cutting red tape” looks like.

Even worse, David Cameron’s administration shifted from external regulation to relying on water companies to “self-report” pollution incidents. In other words, the government depends on these ruthless, offshored corporations to blow the whistle on themselves. The Tories claim to be “tough”, “realistic” and “businesslike”, but their wilful naivety in expecting companies to regulate themselves would astonish a six-year-old.

Morale at the [Environment Agency](#) seems to have plunged even faster than its budget. Over the past few years, I've been contacted by whistleblowers telling similar stories: of having their hands tied behind their backs by the indifference or hostility of successive Tory governments. I've seen how a lack of grit on the part of the agency's top brass, who raise public objections only in the mildest terms, has allowed the government to keep dumping on them.

Last month, the chief executive of the Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan, [told a parliamentary inquiry](#) that his organisation perceived "the overall performance of water companies is improving" and "serious pollution incidents" were falling. A few minutes later, however, he admitted that "over time there are, exactly as you said, greater volumes and greater frequency of spillage".

How can he reconcile these positions? Well, since 2016, according to answers it has sent me, the Environment Agency's monitoring budget has fallen by 55%. So it relies to an even greater extent on water company confessions. The Southern Water case revealed "[very significant under-reporting](#)" of its own malfeasance. Who would have guessed?

Despite repeated public complaints, it took the Environment Agency years to spot the tides of sewage on the south coast. Around the country, people keep stumbling across severe pollution that neither the Environment Agency nor the water companies claim to have noticed.

As a [paper in Nature](#) shows, the evidence gaps are gigantic and the bias is all in one direction. "We're seeing less pollution" doesn't mean there's less pollution. It means there's less seeing. Bevan also agreed that court actions against polluters fell by 98% between 2002 and 2020. Law enforcement has been dying as quickly as our rivers.

['The sea was milky white': how the Southern Water sewage scandal unfolded](#)

[Read more](#)

But this is not the worst of it, because water companies, reckless as they may be, astonishingly are not the country's biggest polluters. After a six-month

investigation, with a team of independent film-makers led by the director Franny Armstrong, tomorrow we will be broadcasting the world's first live investigative documentary, [Rivercide](#). We will expose an astonishing record of filth and failure, leading to the transformation of rivers across the UK, in just a few years, from thriving ecosystems to open sewers. Livestreamed on YouTube, it will identify culprits and press for action.

Across the country, as monitoring, enforcement and prosecution have collapsed, local people are stepping up to fight the rising tide of filth. A national citizens' science project is building, as people around the country take samples and get them analysed, then demand change. But this is no vindication of Cameron's dream of a deregulated "big society". It's a sign of desperation. We love our rivers. We want to swim and paddle and feed the ducks and fish and boat without needing to worry about what's in the water. We do not consent to their use as cheap disposal chutes by ruthless corporations, exploiting the governments' regulatory failures. We do not consent to the tsunami of shit.

Our film is grounded in the same principles. It's crowdfunded, made with the help of volunteers, using citizen science to fill reporting gaps. If change is going to happen, it won't come from the centre. It will come from the margins.

We are no substitute for government, as we have no powers. But we can expose the neglect of those who claim to lead us, and demand that the law is upheld. They might be happy to wallow in filth. We're not.

George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist

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Guardian Opinion cartoon

Priti Patel

Ben Jennings on the charge that Priti Patel ‘stoked the fire’ of racism – cartoon

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Nikole Hannah-Jones stands on the shoulders of Black intellectuals who struggled for decades

Dr Natalie Hopkinson

HBCUs have always punched above their weight while carrying a disproportionate share of the burdens of racism in the US



Charlayne Hunter-Gault. ‘Hunter-Gault did a service to our race and to humanity in general.’ Photograph: NBC NewsWire/NBCU Photo Bank/NBCUniversal/Getty Images

Charlayne Hunter-Gault. ‘Hunter-Gault did a service to our race and to humanity in general.’ Photograph: NBC NewsWire/NBCU Photo Bank/NBCUniversal/Getty Images

Tue 13 Jul 2021 15.08 EDT

In the first week the Black aspiring journalist Charlayne Hunter-Gault integrated the all-white University of Georgia in 1961, there was a riot on campus. The white girls living in the dorm above her took turns stomping on

the floor to torment the new arrival. Hunter-Gault played Black music to drown out the noise and the hatred. “I was listening to Nina Simone’s albums and just very at peace,” she recalls in the buzzy new documentary [Summer of Soul](#), as the singer coos “a new world awaits you”.

Back then, this was the prize that awaited ambitious Black people who won legal battles for access to public universities. Flash forward 60 years, a similar prize was offered to the decorated journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones at her alma mater, the University of North Carolina (UNC), when she was rejected for tenure after a white donor voiced concerns. Hannah-Jones, who rose to fame after conceiving of the New York Times’ 1619 project, then earned tenure after students and alumni took to the streets and her legal team took to the courts.

But Hannah-Jones flipped the script from the traditional civil rights playbook. She rejected the tenure job and [announced](#) last week that she and her fellow journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates were bringing their talents (and an astounding \$20m in donations) to Howard University, the historically Black university where I’m an alumna and now teach.

I encourage everyone to [read Hannah-Jones’ full statement](#) on why she rejected the UNC job, a battle rap-worthy rebuke to the cowards, racists and their powerful enablers that have relentlessly [trolled her](#) since she dared to [write honestly about the legacy of American slavery](#) in the New York Times.



Nikole Hannah-Jones. Photograph: John Minchillo/AP

The amount of money and the attention showered on Hannah-Jones and Coates makes them stand out among HBCU faculty. However, they stand on the shoulders of Black intellectuals who have been doing this dance for generations.

From their founding mostly around the time of the civil war, the more than 100 historically Black colleges and universities in the United States have been brimming with Black genius working in exile from racist American institutions from law and journalism to business and the arts. It remains a well-kept secret that Black colleges are the place to access some of America's greatest minds – both on the faculty and in the student body. This pattern was set early, notably with WEB Du Bois, the dean of Black intellectuals, an NAACP co-founder who learned and taught at Fisk, Howard and Atlanta universities and became Harvard's first Black doctoral graduate in 1895.

HBCUs don't get their props. Those who deny us miss out on all the exuberant, unfiltered [Black joy](#) we know at Black colleges. HBCU intellectuals [teach more than 228,000 of the nation's most promising students](#). There is a family vibe. We are privileged in everything except financial resources. The rewards are tremendous.

But whether in newsrooms or on campuses, Black intellectuals face unique struggles in this country, as I learned from one of my favorite professors at Howard, Dr Clint Wilson II. In the 1990s when I attended Howard, Wilson was the faculty adviser of the student newspaper the Hilltop, named by Zora Neale Hurston in 1924. This is a distinguished, elegant man, a [historian of the Black press](#) who gently guided me, Coates, [Natalie Y Moore](#), [Russell Rickford](#), [Reginold Royston](#) and so many others in the same cohort.

Wilson's father was a [pioneering cartoonist](#) in the Black press. He himself had a distinguished career at the Los Angeles Times, Associated Press and other elite organizations before getting his doctorate at the University of Southern California (USC), where he became the first Black member of the journalism faculty to earn tenure.

When it was clear his USC colleagues merely tolerated but did not respect his pioneering [research on the Black press](#), he, too, was wooed to join Howard in 1986. He also shared his hard-won, empirical insights in his 1991 book, [Black Journalists in Paradox](#). But the academy can be just as anti-Black, perhaps worse. In a 1993 review of Wilson's book in the prestigious academic journal American Journalism, [a white scholar reviewing the book](#) declared it "badly flawed because of his anger".

"The objects of his derision unquestionably deserve criticism," the white reviewer wrote. "However, it is hoped that an academic, who depends heavily on the research of other scholars to bolster his points, would control his bias more than Wilson does here or at least mask it. Such obvious bias only undermines the validity and believability of his points."

To this day, this is the kind of tone-policing that thrives in all elite institutions. Faced with slaps in the face, Black people are expected to sing Negro spirituals and cry it out in pillows while we await our rewards in heaven.

Part of our job as educators is to train Black students to know their worth when they leave our cocoon

When I reached him at his home in Maryland, Wilson was elated at the news of Nikole Hannah-Jones and the return of his former advisee Ta-Nehisi Coates. He had wooed the Knight Foundation for years with a proposal for a similar hub for HBCU journalism in the 1990s, but the timing was not right. He is happy that the time has now come. Battles for inclusion should happen. I personally have spent my adult life toggling back and forth between Black and white institutions because I find opportunities, rewards and friends in both. It is a great privilege for me to walk in the footsteps of scholars such as Dr. Wilson and pay it forward. HBCUs have always punched above their weight while carrying a disproportionate share of the burdens of racism in this country. We face crumbling buildings and inadequate funding for scholarships, equipment, and research.

When I see the riches systematically denied us on the white side of the curtain, it makes me wanna holler. Part of our job as educators is to train Black students to know their worth when they leave our cocoon.

Inclusion will always matter. In 1969, Hunter-Gault was spending a lot of time in Harlem as a correspondent at the New York Times. In Summer of Soul, we see a young Hunter-Gault, afro halo crowning her head, interspersed with contemporary images of the journalist wearing gleaming silver locks.

When a Times editor tried to change her copy, Hunter-Gault wrote a 12-page memo. She successfully pushed for a policy change at the nation's paper of record. As a result, Black people were referred to as "Black" instead of Negro. "I was listening to the community," she recalled.

Hunter-Gault did a service to our race and to humanity in general. Outside of the gaze of national television cameras, Black intellectuals continue to make similar sacrifices every day. Some of us go through the white curtain. Some of us must move through the Black curtain. Some of us toggle back and forth.

What is important is that we all just keep moving.

- Dr Natalie Hopkinson is author of *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, and is an associate professor in the doctoral program in communication, culture and media studies at Howard University
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Boris Johnson gave two reasons for lifting all restrictions. Both are wrong

[Christina Pagel](#)

Allowing mass infections now is a terrible idea, even with so many vaccinated. The NHS will struggle to cope



‘As a society, we should choose to keep in place mask-wearing, and some physical distancing.’ Passengers wearing masks on the London Underground. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

‘As a society, we should choose to keep in place mask-wearing, and some physical distancing.’ Passengers wearing masks on the London Underground. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

Tue 13 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

There were almost [194,000 new cases](#) of Covid-19 reported in England last week, which is [35% more](#) than the week before. At the time of writing, 52% of the UK population had been fully vaccinated. Perhaps another 20% have some immunity from one dose of vaccine or previous Covid infection. If this

level of population immunity was enough to contain the pandemic alongside public health measures, cases would be falling. They aren't falling and it isn't enough.

So cases will keep rising, currently doubling every fortnight or so, until either population immunity is high enough or public health measures are effective enough – or a combination of both – to halt Covid's spread. The government yesterday announced a removal of all public health measures next Monday, meaning that population immunity has to do all the work. With millions of people still without the protection of full vaccination or previous infection, it is inevitable that a good chunk of that immunity will come from new infection rather than vaccination.

Dr Susan Hopkins, the head of Public Health England, estimated [three more doublings](#) of cases before the peak, potentially meaning more than 200,000 cases a day in six weeks' time. Even the health secretary, Sajid Javid, concedes there are likely to be [more than 100,000 cases](#) a day (implying around two more doublings), which would be higher than the highest recorded day in January. This could easily mean another 2 million people infected before cases return to the low levels we saw in early May.

Meanwhile, reports suggest the government is already planning for [a fourth wave](#) this autumn due to the return to school and university, colder weather, and some waning of vaccine effectiveness over time. The question then is how much millions more cases matter, given the economic and mental health benefits of further opening.

The prime minister set out two main arguments in favour of further easing. The first is that well over 90% of the most at-risk people are fully vaccinated, greatly weakening the link between new infections and hospitalisations. The second is that it is better to have mass infection now rather than in the winter when the virus spreads more easily and the [NHS](#) is more stretched. I think both are wrong.

More than 100 scientists set out why allowing mass infection this summer was a terrible idea [in a letter to the Lancet](#) last week. Dr Mike Ryan, the executive director of the World Health Organization's health emergencies programme, called such a strategy "moral emptiness and [epidemiological](#)

stupidity”. Healthcare experts for the [People’s Covid Inquiry](#) called it a “dangerous experiment”. The British Medical Association, [Association of Directors of Public Health](#), [Sage](#) and NHS leaders have all highlighted the danger of allowing mass infection.

First, while we are seeing far fewer hospitalisations than would be the case without a vaccine, hospital admissions are nonetheless rising exponentially. With two or three more doublings, we could be seeing more than 2,000 admissions a day by mid-August – a significant burden on a health service that is already [under immense strain](#), with some hospitals having cancelled elective surgeries and [delayed cancer treatment](#).

The last thing the NHS needs as it tries to cope with [its backlog of 5 million](#) patients is a return to giving up wards and ICUs for Covid care.

Second, infections come with a high burden of long Covid. The Office for National Statistics estimates about [1 million people](#), including 33,000 children, currently live with long Covid in the UK, with 385,000 having symptoms for more than a year and over 600,000 saying it adversely impacts their daily life. With infections falling mainly on the unvaccinated young, we risk burdening a generation with long-term ill health. Both the chief medical officer, [Chris Whitty](#), and the chief executive of NHS Providers, [Dr Chris Hopson](#), have expressed grave concerns over the prospect of hundreds of thousands more cases of long Covid over the coming months.

Third, every new infection presents an opportunity for further mutations of the virus, and any that can better infect the vaccinated will have a large selection advantage. We have already seen the impact of the Delta variant over the past few months – do we really want to work our way through the Greek alphabet?

Fourth, opening further has been billed as “freedom day”, but for many it is anything but. Those living with health conditions that make them more vulnerable to Covid fear a return to shielding indoors as they are no longer protected by low infection rates and measures such as mask-wearing and physical distancing. As [even vaccinated people can and do transmit the virus](#), many of their friends and relatives too will restrict their activities to

protect loved ones. For many, lifting the Covid rules will restrict rather than enable their freedom.

Ultimately, all of this is unnecessary. We have safe and highly effective vaccines, approved for use in everyone over the age of 12. We have an excellent vaccination programme. Evidence suggests that immunity derived from vaccination is more robust than immunity from infection, particularly against new variants. We could offer two doses of vaccine to everyone over 12 by the autumn, offering as many people as possible the protection of vaccination rather than the gamble of infection.

The argument that delaying now will only result in more infections later in the winter ignores three things: the protection millions more (including adolescents) can have from vaccination; the potential for vulnerable adults to receive booster shots in autumn; and, crucially, our ability to offset the additional infection risks of winter with public health measures

If you accept that infections both matter and are avoidable, then it's not about further opening on 19 July, which can only make things worse, but about what we can do now to halt exponential growth and bring down cases. We need to act quickly and act decisively, with strategic testing, contact tracing and supported isolation (including the vaccinated) in all regions, learning from successful efforts in Bolton and Blackburn earlier this summer; a continued requirement to work from home where possible; and with short-lived restrictions, such as a return to outdoor dining, if local directors of public health consider it necessary; and mask-wearing made compulsory again in secondary schools. Any brief return to restrictions must come with financial support for those people and businesses affected.

Infectious diseases are a matter of collective, rather than personal, responsibility. As a society, we could choose to keep in place mask-wearing, some physical distancing and supported isolation of cases and contacts. We could choose to invest in ventilation in business and school buildings – a long-term public health benefit and a key mitigation against Covid. We could choose to suppress this virus over winter and protect our population and our NHS and so provide far more freedom to go about our daily lives. The current government position is that it's not even going to try. This is not good enough and we have to demand better.

- Christina Pagel is director of UCL's Clinical Operational Research Unit, which applies advanced analytical methods to problems in health care
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Climate crisis in the American west

More than 60 wildfires rage across US west – including blaze bigger than Portland

Thousands have been forced to evacuate from Alaska to Wyoming amid soaring temperatures and a drought



A truck driver who hauls fire equipment watches as the Sugar fire, part of the Beckwourth Complex fire, burns in Doyle, California, on Saturday.
Photograph: Noah Berger/AP

A truck driver who hauls fire equipment watches as the Sugar fire, part of the Beckwourth Complex fire, burns in Doyle, California, on Saturday.
Photograph: Noah Berger/AP

Guardian staff and agencies
Tue 13 Jul 2021 20.50 EDT

More than 60 wildfires were burning across at least 10 states in the parched American west on Tuesday, with the largest, in [Oregon](#), consuming an area

nearly twice the size of Portland.

The fires have torched homes and forced thousands to evacuate from Alaska to [Wyoming](#), according to the National Interagency Fire Center. Arizona, Idaho and Montana accounted for more than half of the large active fires.

The fires erupted as the [west was in the grip of the second bout of dangerously high temperatures](#) in just a few weeks. A major drought, exacerbated by the climate crisis, is contributing to conditions that make fires even more dangerous, scientists say.

[American west stuck in cycle of ‘heat, drought and fire’, experts warn](#)
[Read more](#)

The National Weather Service says the heatwave appeared to have peaked in many areas, and excessive-heat warnings were largely expected to expire by Tuesday. However, they continued into Tuesday night in some [California](#) deserts, and many areas were still expected to see highs in the 80s and 90s.

00:57

Satellite imagery captures wildfires raging through Oregon – video

In northern California, a combined pair of lightning-ignited blazes dubbed the Beckwourth Complex is now 46% contained, [according to an incident report](#). Firefighters spent days battling flames that were fueled by winds, hot weather and low humidity that sapped the moisture from vegetation. Evacuation orders were in place for more than 3,000 residents of remote northern areas and neighboring Nevada.

There were reports of burned homes, but damage was still being tallied. The blaze had consumed 140 sq miles (362 sq km) of land, including in Plumas national forest.

A fire that began on Sunday in the Sierra Nevada south of Yosemite national park exploded over 14 sq miles (36 sq km) and was just 10% contained.

The largest fire in the US lay across the California border in south-western Oregon. The Bootleg fire – which doubled and doubled again over the

weekend – threatened some 2,000 homes, state fire officials said. It had burned at least seven homes and more than 40 other buildings.

00:49

'It's a tornado': firefighter captures blaze engulfing California town – video

Tim McCarley told KPTV-TV that he and his family were ordered to flee their home on Friday with flames just minutes behind them.

"They told us to get the hell out 'cause if not, you're dead," he said.

He described the blaze as "like a firenado" with flames leaping dozens of feet into the air and jumping around, catching trees "and then just explosions, boom, boom, boom, boom".

The fire was burning in the Fremont-Winema national forest, near the Klamath county town of Sprague River. It had ravaged an area of about 240 sq miles (621 sq km), or nearly twice the size of Portland. Firefighters hadn't managed to surround any of it as they struggled to build containment lines.

The fire drastically disrupted service on three transmission lines providing up to 5,500 megawatts of electricity to California, and California's power grid operator has repeatedly asked for voluntary power conservation during evening hours.

Elsewhere, a forest fire started during lightning storms in southeast Washington grew to 86 sq miles (223 sq km). It was 20% contained on Monday.

Another fire west of Winthrop closed the scenic North Cascades Highway, the most northern route through the Cascade Range. The road provides access to North Cascades national park and the Ross Lake national recreation area.

In [Idaho](#), the national guard has been mobilized to help fight twin lightning-sparked fires that have together charred nearly 24 sq miles (62 sq km) of dry

timber in the remote, drought-stricken region.

In total, there are 67 active large fires in the US, which have burned more than 1,434 [sq miles](#), according to the National Interagency Fire Center. More than 14,200 wildland firefighters, as well as support personnel, are assigned to fire incidents, the center says.

There has been a dramatic increase year-to-date in 2021 compared to 2020. From 1 January to 13 July of 2021, there have been 33,953 fires, compared with 27,770 in the same period of 2020, the center says.

The July heatwave follows an unusual June siege of broiling temperatures in the west and comes amid worsening drought conditions throughout the region.

Scientists say human-caused climate breakdown and decades of fire suppression that increases fuel loads have aggravated fire conditions across the region.

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Siberia wildfires: Russia army planes and thousands of firefighters battle blazes

About 800,000 hectares of forest destroyed so far in region enveloped by smoke as Russia suffers through ‘abnormal heatwave’



A firefighter battles a forest fire in Yakutia. Wildfires are tearing across Siberia in Russia, sparking a state of emergency in Yakutia, where residents say they are being ‘poisoned’ by smoke. Photograph: Aerial Forest Protection Service

A firefighter battles a forest fire in Yakutia. Wildfires are tearing across Siberia in Russia, sparking a state of emergency in Yakutia, where residents say they are being ‘poisoned’ by smoke. Photograph: Aerial Forest Protection Service

Reuters

Tue 13 Jul 2021 20.36 EDT

Russia's army has sent water-bombing planes to support thousands of firefighters battling huge wildfires in Siberia, a region known for its frozen tundra that is now sweltering under a heatwave.

Flames are tearing across 800,000 hectares of forest, and the hardest-hit region of Yakutia in the north has been in a state of emergency for weeks as climate scientists sound the alarm about the potential long-term impact.

On Tuesday, more than 2,600 firefighters were battling blazes in Yakutia, which has borne the brunt of the fires in recent years.

[Severe drought threatens Hoover dam reservoir – and water for US west](#)
[Read more](#)

“We’re suffocating, our lungs are being poisoned by acrid smoke,” reads one of two online petitions by Yakutia’s residents addressed to President Vladimir Putin. They are asking for more equipment and forces to combat the fires.

Russia has seen its annual fire season become more ferocious in recent years, as climate change has driven unusually high temperatures across the northern Siberian tundra. This year, temperatures have already hit new record highs.

“The fire risk has seriously flared up across practically the entire country because of the abnormal heatwave,” defence minister Sergei Shoigu said on Tuesday.



Wildfires have destroyed dozens of houses in the central western Chelyabinsk region in Russia. Photograph: Russian Emergencies Ministry Handout/EPA

Putin ordered the defence ministry to assist local authorities, while the army deployed several water-dropping Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft to douse the flames from the sky, Shoigu said, without specifying exactly how many aircraft were sent.

Fires in Russia's central Chelyabinsk region last week killed one man and destroyed dozens of village homes.

The Siberian fires have raised fears about the permafrost and peatlands thawing, releasing carbon long stored in the frozen tundra.

Ash from the fires could also blanket nearby snow cover, turning it dark so that it absorbs more solar radiation and warms even faster.

In both 2019 and 2020, Yakutia's wildfires led to record amounts of greenhouse gases being released from the region, according to the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS), part of a European Union observation programme.

In the past six weeks, fires in the region have produced about 150 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent – close to the 2017 annual fossil fuel emissions of Venezuela, said Mark Parrington, a senior scientist at CAMS.

“We’re still piecing together the information to try and understand what it means for the climate,” he said. “This year we haven’t yet seen so many fires within the Arctic Circle within that region, but just within the last three to four days we’ve started to see a number of hotspots occurring and a lot of smoke,” said Parrington.

The country has struggled under a heatwave that has broken several temperature records in western Russia. Moscow has sweltered through its [hottest June day for 120 years](#) after the temperature hit 34.7C.



Smoke hangs over the city of Yakutsk, coming from wildfire-hit Gorny and Khangalassky districts. Photograph: Vadim Skryabin/TASS

In Siberia, the city of Yakutsk hit 35C at one point; and the region’s city of Verkhoyansk – seen as one of the coldest places on Earth – saw temperatures of over 30C, the state weather forecast agency said.

“The temperature is really high, 8-10 degrees higher than the norm. It’s really unusual for the temperature to be over 30 degrees towards the north,”

the agency's head of science, Roman Vilfand, said at a briefing.

He said the temperature should fall in the coming week with rain also increasing, factors that should slightly reduce the risk of new fires sparking, though they might not stop existing fires spreading.

Similar conditions in parts of Canada and the US Pacific north-west have also lead to wildfires. Nearly 60 wildfires were [burning across 10 states in the parched American west](#) on Tuesday, with the largest, in Oregon, consuming an area nearly twice the size of Portland.

“These fires will continue to happen with climate change,” said Andrey Shegolev, head of WWF Russia’s forest programme office, who urged more funding for local firefighting efforts. “The question in this situation is, what to do?”

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US news

Four alleged Iranian spies charged in plot to kidnap US-based journalist and critic

Members allegedly explored ways to spirit journalist away by speedboat in scheme that reads like ‘far-fetched movie plot’, FBI says



Four Iranians, one an intelligence officer, have been charged by the US justice department of conspiring to kidnap a New York journalist.
Photograph: Atta Kenare/AFP/Getty Images

Four Iranians, one an intelligence officer, have been charged by the US justice department of conspiring to kidnap a New York journalist.
Photograph: Atta Kenare/AFP/Getty Images

Julian Borger in Washington

Tue 13 Jul 2021 20.22 EDT

Four members of an alleged Iranian spy network have been charged with plotting the kidnapping of an Iranian-American journalist and activist based in

New York.

According to the [indictment](#), the spy network was exploring ways to spirit the journalist from her home in Brooklyn and take her by speedboat out to sea, and then to Venezuela, which maintains friendly ties to Tehran.

William Sweeney, the head of New York's FBI office, conceded the charges had the ring of "some far-fetched movie plot".

"We allege a group, backed by the Iranian government, conspired to kidnap a US based journalist here on our soil and forcibly return her to [Iran](#)," Sweeney said. "Not on our watch."

This speedboat scheme appears to have been considered only after the failure of efforts to persuade the target's family to lure her to a third country in the Middle East, from where she would have been seized by Iranian agents, a technique used by Tehran in two recent incidents.

The target is named in the indictment only as "Victim-1" but Masih Alinejad, an outspoken critic of the Tehran government who lives in New York, confirmed that she was the intended victim.

"About eight months or so ago, the FBI warned me that there was a plot against me," Alinejad told the Guardian in an email on Tuesday evening. "I said that's not exactly news, I get death threats daily. The next thing is that the FBI tell me that I'm being targeted, that I am under photo and video surveillance in an operation by the intelligence ministry."

"The plot is pretty horrific but the FBI had my back. My family stayed in three safe houses for three months," she said.

[Hopes raised for two Americans jailed in Tehran being freed](#)
[Read more](#)

According to the US charges, the plot to abduct Alinejad was part of a broader kidnapping campaign developed by the Iranian intelligence ministry, with intended targets in Canada, the UK and the UAE.

In each case, the tactics appear to have been the same: private investigator agencies were hired under false pretences to conduct surveillance on the intended victim.

“As alleged, four of the defendants monitored and planned to kidnap a US citizen of Iranian origin who has been critical of the regime’s autocracy, and to forcibly take their intended victim to Iran, where the victim’s fate would have been uncertain at best,” said [Audrey Strauss](#), US attorney for the Southern District of New York.



Masih Alinejad in London. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

The spy network is alleged to have consisted of Alireza Shavaroghi Farahani, a 50 year-old senior Iranian intelligence official, who ran a network of three agents who are accused of having coordinated surveillance operations from Tehran, and organised a money laundering scheme to pay for it.

The three others were named as Mahmoud Khazein, aged 42; Kiya Sadeghi, 35 and Omid Noori, 45. All of them are believed to be in Iran. An Iranian-American, Niloufar “Nellie” Bahadorifar, a 46-year-old based in California, was arrested at the beginning of the month and charged separately with providing financial services in support of the plot.

Over the past year, at least two other Iranian dissidents have been abducted abroad and taken back to Iran. Ruhollah Zam, a 42-year-old dissident journalist who had fled Iran in 2011 and was granted asylum in France, was lured to Iraq on false pretences in 2019. He was arrested by Iraqi police and handed over to Iran. In Tehran he was convicted without evidence of espionage, and was [executed](#) in December 2020.

Another Iranian-American, [Jamshid Sharmahd](#), a spokesman for a militant Iranian opposition group, was lured to Dubai in July 2020, where he disappeared. A few days later, Iran claimed it had captured him in a “complex operation” and video of him confessing to alleged crimes was broadcast on state television. Sharmahd is still in prison in Iran.

One of the alleged plotters is said to have had a picture of Zam, Sharmahd and Alinejad on an electronic device with the words in Farsi: “Gradually the gathering gets bigger ... Are you coming or should we come for you?”

According to the indictment, Alinejad was targeted for her campaign against the compulsory use of hijab head coverings for Iranian women. In July 2019, the head of the revolutionary courts warned that anyone caught sending Alinejad video material that undermined or criticised hijab laws would be committing the crime of cooperating with a hostile foreign government and would face up to 10 years in prison.

The prosecutors allege that efforts to abduct Alinejad had already begun the previous year, when the Iranian intelligence network tried to persuade Alinejad’s relatives in Iran to invite her to a third country “apparently for the purpose of having [her] arrested or detained and transported to Iran for imprisonment”.

Her relatives were offered money to issue the invitation but they turned it down, prosecutors said. In September 2019, one of Alinejad’s relatives was arrested and sentenced to eight years, accused of maintaining contact with her.

The indictment claimed the plot to kidnap her from New York began in June 2020, when members of the alleged network hired a New York private detective agency to carry out surveillance of Alinejad, under the cover story

that one of her friends had fled the Middle East with unpaid bills and her debtors were trying to find them.

The charges suggest the FBI was able to hack into the network's electronic devices and monitor communications and internet searches. The alleged Iranian spies were said to have researched travel routes from Alinejad's home to a "waterfront neighborhood in Brooklyn". They are also said to have "researched a service offering military-style speedboats for self-operated maritime evacuation out of Manhattan, New York, and maritime travel from New York to Venezuela".

There is no evidence presented in the indictment that the plot progressed beyond research of the alleged abduction route.

The same alleged network is accused of carrying out surveillance on three targets in Canada and one in the UK, where beginning on 17 September 2020, it hired private investigators to conduct surveillance on an unnamed "Iranian expatriate journalist and political commentator". The British investigators are said to have taken pictures of the journalist's home. Farahani is also alleged to have ordered the surveillance of targets in the UAE.

Alinejad, who has clashed with other Iranian-Americans over her campaign against hijab regulations, and over US diplomatic overtures to Tehran, insisted she was undeterred.

"Compulsory hijab is like the Berlin Wall, once it falls, the regime in Iran falls, too," she said. "And now I'm giving voice to the mothers who lost their children in the November 2019 protests."

"My life is what it is," she added. "I will live my life as I have. The regime has guns and bullets, we have social media."



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[Carlos Ghosn](#)

Ex-Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn talks of daring escape from Japan

Fugitive banker, accused of financial misconduct, tells BBC how he fled Japan hidden in a box on a private jet



Carlos Ghosn in Beirut in June. He said: 'The 30 minutes waiting in the box on the plane was probably the longest wait I've ever experienced in my life.'

Photograph: Mohamed Azakir/Reuters

Carlos Ghosn in Beirut in June. He said: 'The 30 minutes waiting in the box on the plane was probably the longest wait I've ever experienced in my life.'

Photograph: Mohamed Azakir/Reuters

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Wed 14 Jul 2021 03.05 EDT

[Carlos Ghosn](#) has for the first time given details about his daring escape from Japan while he was awaiting trial on charges of financial misconduct.

In an interview with the BBC, the former [Nissan](#) chairman confirmed reports that he was smuggled out of [Japan](#) while out on bail in December 2019

inside a box used to store musical equipment, before arriving in Lebanon via Turkey.

In previous public comments, Ghosn, who holds Brazilian, French and Lebanese passports, had refused to explain how he escaped.

“The plane was scheduled to take off at 11pm,” Ghosn said, recalling the time he spent inside the box at an airport in western [Japan](#) waiting to board a private jet and flee a justice system he has claimed would have wrongly found him guilty of concealing income and misusing company funds.

“The 30 minutes waiting in the box on the plane, waiting for it to take off, was probably the longest wait I’ve ever experienced in my life,” he said. In all, he said, he was concealed inside the box for about an hour and a half, adding that it felt like “one year and a half”.

The fugitive also spoke of the elation he felt when he landed in his native Lebanon, which does not have an extradition treaty with Japan. “The thrill was that finally, I’m going to be able to tell the story,” he said.

Ghosn’s criticism of his treatment in Japan following his dramatic [arrest](#) in late 2018 triggered unprecedented [scrutiny of the country’s criminal justice system](#), where prosecutors can detain suspects for long periods and more than 99% of criminal cases end with guilty verdicts.

[Carlos Ghosn: an arrest, an escape, and questions about justice in Japan](#)
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Ghosn spent long periods in custody at a [detention centre in Tokyo](#) before being [granted bail](#) a second time several months before his escape. He faced 15 years in prison if convicted.

“The plan was I could not show my face so I have to be hidden somewhere,” he said of the day of his escape. “And the only way I could be hidden [was] to be in a box or be in a luggage so nobody could see me, nobody could recognise me and the plan could work.”

Ghosn has faced criticism for choosing not to defend himself in court, while one of his former colleagues stands trial in Japan along with two men accused of masterminding his flight from justice.

Greg Kelly, a former Nissan executive who was close to Ghosn, faces a prison sentence if he is found guilty of helping his former boss underreport his income by tens of millions of dollars.

Kelly has denied the charges, and a verdict is expected later this year.

Michael and Peter Taylor, the American father and son who transported Ghosn from a hotel to the airport on the day of his escape, face almost three years in prison for helping him escape.

The Taylors, who were extradited from the US earlier this year, apologised to the Japanese authorities for their alleged role in Ghosn's escape.

"I'm remorseful, and I'm sorry," Michael Taylor told a court in Tokyo earlier this month. His son said: "I apologise to the people of Japan, and I deeply regret my action."

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Joe Biden

‘Have you no shame?’: Biden decries Republican attacks on voting rights

President condemns Trump’s ‘big lie’ about a stolen election but fails to mention filibuster in 20-minute Philadelphia speech

02:37

Biden: 'peddlers of lies' are threatening American democracy – video

David Smith in Washington

@smithinamerica

Tue 13 Jul 2021 17.13 EDT

Joe Biden has made an impassioned attack on racist voting laws sweeping America, warning that “the 21st-century Jim Crow assault is real” and demanding of Republicans: “Have you no shame?”

[Biden defends voting rights – but no word on ending the filibuster](#)

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But the president faced instant criticism from progressives for failing in his 20-minute speech to mention the filibuster, a Senate procedural rule that has thwarted efforts to safeguard democracy.

With [voting rights under siege](#) from Republican-controlled state legislatures, Biden on Tuesday delivered his most forceful remarks yet on the issue, directly condemning his predecessor Donald Trump’s “big lie” about a stolen election.

He noted that 17 states had enacted 28 laws that make it harder to vote, with 400 bills pending. These are likely to have a disproportionate impact on people of colour. Citing the legalised segregation of America’s past, the president warned: “The 21st-century Jim Crow assault is real, it’s unrelenting, and we’re going to challenge it vigorously.”

He delivered a blunt message to Republicans: “Stand up, for God’s sake, and help prevent this concerted effort to undermine our elections and the sacred right to vote. Have you no shame? Whether it’s stopping foreign interference in our elections with the spread of disinformation from within, we have to work together.”

The president has been praised for ignoring Trump’s attacks and insults in an apparent effort to restore civility to Washington. But speaking at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, he took off the gloves regarding Trump’s false claims of voter fraud at the 2020 election, which culminated in a deadly attack on the US Capitol on 6 January.

No other election has ever been held under such scrutiny and such standards. The big lie is just that: a big lie

Joe Biden

More people than ever before cast a vote, Biden said, and challenges to the outcome were rejected by local election officials, state legislatures and more than 80 judges. Recounts were held in Arizona, Wisconsin and Georgia and did not alter the outcome.

“It’s clear for those who challenge the results and question the integrity of the election, no other election has ever been held under such scrutiny and such standards. The big lie is just that: a big lie.”

The crowd clapped enthusiastically. In a clear swipe at Trump’s refusal to accept defeat, Biden continued: “In America, if you lose, you accept the results. You follow the constitution. You try again. You don’t call facts ‘fake’ and then try to bring down the American experiment just because you’re unhappy. That’s not statesmanship. That’s selfishness.

“That’s not democracy, it’s a denial of the right to vote. It suppresses, it subjugates, the denial of full and free and fair elections, the most un-American thing that any of us can imagine, the most undemocratic, most unpatriotic.”

Biden noted that the rest of the world was watching, saying that he had just returned from G7 and Nato meetings in Europe.

“They ask me, ‘Is it going to be OK?’ The citadel of democracy in the world. ‘Is it going to be OK?’”

He warned: “So hear me clearly. There’s an unfolding assault taking place in America today, an attempt to suppress and subvert right to vote in fair and free elections, an assault on democracy, an assault on liberty, an assault on who we are, who we are as Americans. But make no mistake, bullies and merchants of fear, peddlers of lies, are threatening the very foundation of our country.”

Now 78, Biden said he had never expected to utter such words.

“We’re facing the most significant test of our democracy since the civil war, That’s not hyperbole. Since the civil war. The Confederates, back then, never breached the Capitol as insurrectionists did on 6 January. I’m not saying this to alarm you. I’m saying this because you should be alarmed.”

The president has faced pressure from activists to use his “bully pulpit” and do more to raise awareness of the assault on voting rights. Last week he and Kamala Harris, the vice-president leading efforts on the issue, hosted civil rights leaders.

On Tuesday, Biden promised that the justice department would use its authority to challenge “the onslaught of state laws” undermining voting rights in old and new ways. Its voting rights division will double in size.

Biden described it as a “national imperative” for Congress to pass the For the People Act to fight voter suppression, get dark money out of politics and end partisan gerrymandering. But he noted that last month Republicans refused to even debate it.

[Legal threats to Donald Trump ‘more serious than ever before’, experts say](#)
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He also touted the John Lewis Voting Rights Act but neither bill stands a realistic prospect of reaching his desk while Republicans hold 50 Senate seats and are able to deploy the filibuster, which requires a majority of 60 in the 100-seat chamber. Yet Biden did not address the issue.

Some leading Democrats, including the House majority whip, James Clyburn, a Biden ally, have called for [creating a filibuster carveout](#) to allow voting rights bills to pass. Biden made no reference to this workaround solution.

Some observers expressed frustration. Ezra Levin, co-executive director of the grassroots movement Indivisible, tweeted: “We’ve waited more than six months for the president to give a speech on democracy. And that’s what they came up with?”

He added: “You cannot defeat the GOP attack on democracy just by educating voters ahead of 2022. You will lose. We will lose. Our democracy will lose. Stop passing the buck and focus on passing the damn bill.”

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Books

Drunken Giuliani urged Trump to ‘just say we won’ on election night, book says

As key states started to slip away from Trump, Rudy Giuliani repeatedly urged former president to lie, according to new book

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Rudy Giuliani told a furious Trump: ‘You’ve got to go declare victory now,’ according to book by Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker of the Washington Post. Photograph: Nathan Posner/Rex/Shutterstock

Rudy Giuliani told a furious Trump: ‘You’ve got to go declare victory now,’ according to book by Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker of the Washington Post. Photograph: Nathan Posner/Rex/Shutterstock

*Martin Pengelly in Washington
@MartinPengelly*

Tue 13 Jul 2021 11.57 EDT

A drunken [Rudy Giuliani](#) repeatedly urged Donald Trump to “just say we won” on election night last November, according to a new book, even as key states started to slip away from the president and defeat by Joe Biden drew near.

[Landslide review: Michael Wolff’s third Trump book is his best – and most alarming](#)

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The former mayor of New York was then acting as Trump’s personal attorney, a role in which he had fueled Trump’s first impeachment and would later lead hapless attempts to prove Trump’s lie that his defeat was the result of electoral fraud.

According to Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker of the Washington Post, authors of the forthcoming [I Alone Can Fix It: Donald J. Trump’s Catastrophic Final Year](#), Giuliani approached senior Trump aides early on election night at the White House.

“What’s happening in Michigan?” he asked.

The campaign manager, Bill Stepien, chief of staff, Mark Meadows, and senior adviser Jason Miller told him it was too early to know.

“Just say we won,” Giuliani said.

The aides said it was the same in Pennsylvania.

“Just say we won,” Giuliani said.

“Giuliani’s grand plan,” the authors report, “was to just say Trump won, state after state, based on nothing. Stepien, Miller and Meadows thought his argument was both incoherent and irresponsible.”

Meadows reportedly responded, angrily: “We can’t do that. We can’t.”

But Trump did.

Leonnig and Rucker, co-authors of another Trump bestseller, [A Very Stable Genius](#), report that Giuliani refused to accept the early call of Arizona, another key state, [by Fox News](#).

“Just go declare victory right now,” Giuliani reportedly told a furious Trump. “You’ve got to go declare victory now.”

At 2am, Trump walked into the East Room.

“This is a fraud on the American public,” he said. “This is an embarrassment to our country. We were getting ready to win this election. Frankly, we did win this election. We did win this election.”

Trump’s words gave a title to another author in the crowded field of Trump-based reportage and tell-all, Michael Bender of the Wall Street Journal. His book, [Frankly, We Did Win This Election](#), and a third by Michael Wolff, [Landslide](#), provide similar accounts of Giuliani’s behaviour and inebriation at key moments.

In his remarks in the East Room, Trump laid the ground for his “big lie” about electoral fraud, the failed legal efforts to prove it, and the deadly assault on the US Capitol on 6 January.

[Frankly, We Did Win This Election review: a devastating dispatch from Trumpworld](#)

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“This is a very big moment,” he said. “This is a major fraud in our nation. We want the law to be used in a proper manner … To me, this is a very sad moment, and we will win this. And as far as I’m concerned, we already have won it.”

Who wins the battle of the Trump bestsellers remains to be seen. Leonnig and Rucker, [both Pulitzer prize winners](#), would seem well-placed. Their account is drier in style than those by Wolff and Bender but still contains entertaining nuggets from the bizarre last days of a bizarre presidency.

Of Giuliani, now barred from practising law in New York and Washington DC, an anonymous adviser is quoted as saying: “It’s hard to be the responsible parent when there’s a cool uncle around taking the kid to the movies and driving him around in a Corvette.

“When we say the president can’t say that, being responsible is not the easiest place to be when you’ve got people telling the president what he wants to hear. It’s hard to tell the president no. It’s not an enviable place to be.”

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Banking

Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan report bumper second-quarter profits

Investment banking arms of two Wall Street firms benefit from global glut of mergers and acquisitions



Goldman Sachs had the second-best quarterly profit in the firm's history in the quarter ending in June 2021. Photograph: Richard Drew/AP

Goldman Sachs had the second-best quarterly profit in the firm's history in the quarter ending in June 2021. Photograph: Richard Drew/AP

Kalyeena Makortoff, Banking correspondent

[@kalyeena](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 13.18 EDT

Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan have reported bumper profits for the second quarter as their investment banking divisions continued to ride the global boom in mergers and takeover deals.

The two US banks have been capitalising on the [surge in merger and acquisitions](#) activity, which broke records for the second straight quarter in the three months to June, according to Refinitiv data, and helped make up for a slowdown in trading since the start of the year.

Goldman Sachs, which continues to generate the highest investment banking fees among its peers, reported profits of \$5.5bn (£4bn) in the second quarter. That was the second highest profit on record for the bank, only surpassed by its first quarter of 2021, and compared with just \$373m in profits a year earlier when the group had to draw down provisions [to cover a \\$2.9bn settlement](#) over the 1MDB corruption scandal with global regulators.

Revenues were also the second highest on record, at \$15.4bn, thanks to a strong performance from its investment banking division, with particular strength from its financial advisory, equity underwriting and debt underwriting operations.

“Our second-quarter performance and record revenues for the first half of the year demonstrate the strength of our client franchise and our continued progress on our strategic priorities”, Goldman’s chairman and chief executive, David Solomon, said. However, he cautioned that clients would still face challenges as the world started to recover from the pandemic.

Meanwhile, rival [JP Morgan](#) reported a 150% jump in profits thanks to improving economic forecasts that meant it could release roughly \$3bn worth of reserves originally put aside to deal with potential defaults linked to the pandemic. That compared with the same period last year, when the bank put aside \$8.9bn to deal with the potential fallout of the Covid crisis.

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“This quarter we once again benefited from a significant reserve release as the environment continues to improve,” JP Morgan’s chief executive and chairman, Jamie Dimon, said. “Consumer and wholesale balance sheets remain exceptionally strong as the economic outlook continues to improve.”

It helped profits at JP Morgan rise to \$12bn for the three months to the end of June, up from \$4.7bn a year earlier. And while revenues fell 7% to

\$31.4bn, the banking group still benefited from strong dealmaking, with investment banking revenues rising 37% year-on-year.

Goldman Sachs released a much smaller portion of its reserves, totalling just \$92m, saying that stronger economic forecasts were partly offset by provisions it had to put aside to cover its growing loan book, primarily for credit cards. The bank put aside \$1.6bn to cover the risk of Covid defaults in the second quarter last year.

JP Morgan also released a memo to UK staff on Tuesday, announcing a gradual return to the office for local staff from Monday, when most Covid restrictions are due to be lifted.

The bank said it would continue to cap office capacity at 50%, requiring staff to rotate between home and office, before lifting those restrictions “in the coming weeks and months”. Staff will also be required to wear masks in common areas, and do a daily health check-in on the company website before coming into the office. Workers will also continue to have access to free PCR tests provided by the bank.

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The Peter Falconio murder case

Peter Falconio murder: Northern Territory police renew appeal to find body after 20 years

Body of missing British backpacker, who was shot dead north of Alice Springs in outback Australia in 2001, has never been found



British backpacker Peter Falconio was murdered in outback Australia on 14 July 2001 while travelling along the Stuart Highway north of Alice Springs. Two decades after his death, police are still searching for his body.
Photograph: Shutterstock

British backpacker Peter Falconio was murdered in outback Australia on 14 July 2001 while travelling along the Stuart Highway north of Alice Springs. Two decades after his death, police are still searching for his body.
Photograph: Shutterstock

Australian Associated Press

Tue 13 Jul 2021 22.38 EDT

Two decades after one of Australia's most notorious outback murders, police are still searching for the body of missing British backpacker Peter Falconio.

Northern Territory police remain hopeful they'll one day provide closure to the then 28-year-old's family, with investigators urging anyone with information to come forward.

It comes amid renewed calls for the man convicted of Falconio's murder, Bradley John Murdoch, to reveal where he dumped the body.

Falconio was driving with his girlfriend Joanne Lees along the Stuart Highway north of Alice Springs on 14 July 2001, when Murdoch drove up behind them.

He indicated for them to pull over, saying their van might have an engine problem.

Falconio went behind the car with Murdoch to investigate, and Lees heard a gunshot, before Murdoch cable-tied her and covered her head.

She escaped and hid in bushland for five hours while Murdoch hunted her with his dog before she managed to flag down a truck driver.

Falconio's body has never been found.

Murdoch is serving a life sentence with a 28-year non-parole period. He has refused to tell detectives where Falconio's body is.

The NT chief minister, Michael Gunner, said the murder was a callous and sickening act of violence.

“The murder of Peter Falconio was a deeply disturbing and traumatic event that had a profound effect on many people,” he said on Wednesday. “Not the least being Mr Falconio’s family and his girlfriend at the time,” Joanne Lees.”



Peter Falconio with and his girlfriend Joanne Lees. Photograph: AAP

He said it was “some comfort” that Murdoch was apprehended and jailed, and will not menace the public again.

“Murdoch has never shown remorse for his crime. It would be fitting for him to show some decency and reveal Mr Falconio’s whereabouts for the sake of those who loved him,” he said.

NT detective senior sergeant Karl Day said he hoped the milestone led to someone coming forward with fresh information so the missing person investigation could be solved.

“On this 20th anniversary of the tragic disappearance of Peter Falconio the NT police would like to take the opportunity remind everyone that the missing person investigation into Peter remains an open and active case,” he said.

“Police are urging anyone out there, with any information that may assist Peter’s family in gaining some sort closure, to come forward and contact police.”

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‘Fossil fuel friends’: Saudi Arabia and Bahrain back Australia’s lobbying on Great Barrier Reef

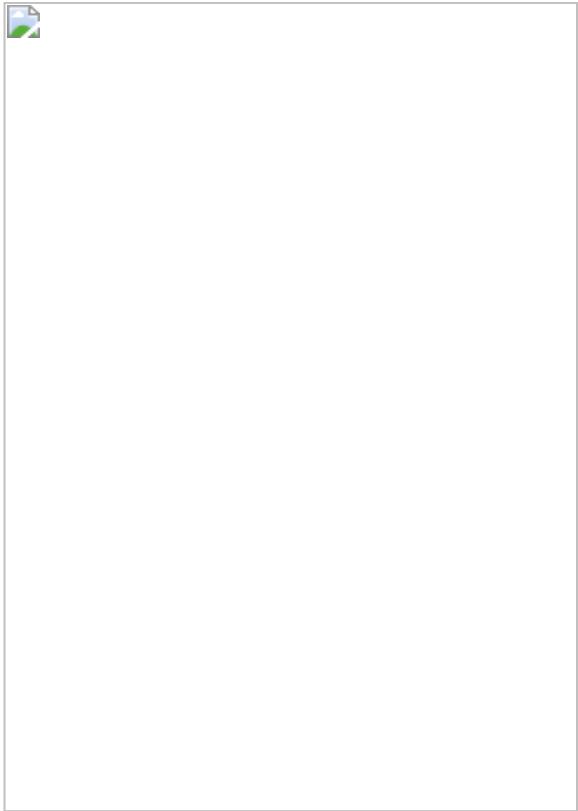
Exclusive: oil rich nations back push against Unesco recommendation to have reef placed on world heritage ‘in danger’ list



The Unesco world heritage committee’s decision on the Great Barrier Reef’s ‘in danger’ status is currently scheduled for 23 July. Photograph: James Cook University/AFP via Getty Images

The Unesco world heritage committee’s decision on the Great Barrier Reef’s ‘in danger’ status is currently scheduled for 23 July. Photograph: James Cook University/AFP via Getty Images

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Wed 14 Jul 2021 01.46 EDT

Australia has gained the support of oil-rich Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in its lobbying effort to keep the [Great Barrier Reef](#) off a list of world heritage sites in danger.

The two nations, both members of the 21-country committee, are co-sponsoring amendments seen by the Guardian that back Australia and ask

the world heritage committee to push back a key decision until at least 2023.

In a meeting on Tuesday night, Australian time, a senior official from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) told Australia's environment minister, [Sussan Ley](#), during a face-to-face meeting in Paris the organisation had followed all necessary steps before recommending the reef be listed as in danger.

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The Morrison government is in the middle of an all-out lobbying effort, [hosting ambassadors at the reef](#) while deploying Ley to Europe for a week of meetings.

The Australian government briefed conservation groups on Wednesday about the amendments, saying they were co-sponsored by the two Middle Eastern countries.

The world heritage committee will begin a 15-day meeting on Friday with a decision on the Great Barrier Reef currently scheduled for 23 July.

In the amendments, the committee is being asked to reject Unesco's official finding the reef was facing "ascertained danger" – a trigger for entry onto the "in danger" list.

A Unesco mission would be held to "develop a set of corrective measures" before Australia sends a report to the UN organisation by December 2022, rather than the original February 2022 date.

[Australia to host ambassadors at Great Barrier Reef ahead of 'in danger' list vote](#)

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Instead of asking the committee to decide next week on the "in danger" inscription, the amendments state that should not be considered until 2023 at

the earliest.

Diplomats from 16 countries and the EU are flying to far north Queensland on Wednesday ahead of a [snorkelling trip to be hosted by the government's reef ambassador](#), MP Warren Entsch, on Thursday.

David Cazzulino, the Great Barrier Reef campaigner at the Australian Marine Conservation Society, said Australia was being forced “to find friends with other fossil fuel polluters”.

“I hope when the ambassadors go to the reef, they get to see its wonderful beauty,” Cazzulino said. “But I hope they also hear the true scientific understanding as we know it.”

Unesco’s recommendation for the danger listing was due to a lack of progress on cutting pollution from the land and the impact of three mass coral bleaching events in 2016, 2017 and 2020 – all happening since the world heritage committee last voted on the state of the reef in 2015.

Climate and reef scientists have long warned of the threat to coral reefs from fossil fuel burning, causing ocean temperatures to rise and the water to become less alkaline.

The amendments retain a request from Unesco that a new version of Australia’s main reef conservation policy – the Reef 2050 plan – “fully incorporates” recommendations from the reef’s management authority “that accelerated action at all possible levels is required to address the threat from climate change”.

[Australian environment groups urge UN to put Great Barrier Reef on ‘in danger’ list](#)

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Entsch has said he would be accompanied on the snorkelling trip by officials and scientists from the Australian Institute of Marine Science and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Ambassadors were paying their own airfares, he said on Wednesday.

Ley met with Ernesto Ottone, an assistant director general at the Unesco headquarters in Paris, on Tuesday night.

“The questions were mainly on procedural matters,” Unesco said in a statement. “The meeting was an opportunity to reiterate that all steps had been taken according to the rules and to reiterate the different scientific elements that were used to conclude that the reef is in danger.”

Richard Leck, head of oceans at WWF-Australia, was in the briefing delivered by the Australian government on Wednesday. He said the amendments “kick the can down the road on climate action” and would delay improvements to water quality.

Leck said the Reef 2050 plan had still not been finalised despite it being due in 2020 “and the amendments suggest there won’t be a plan for another 18 months”. “Australians expect much stronger and more urgent progress in protecting the reef, which is why WWF supports the draft decision as it currently stands,” he said.

The campaigner said it was “concerning” Australia had joined with other fossil fuel dependant countries to “work together to push back action on climate change”.

The Queensland premier, [Annastacia Palaszczuk](#), wrote to the prime minister, [Scott Morrison](#), on Tuesday asking him to match more than \$2bn of funding for renewable energy and water quality projects along the 2,300km reef.

A federal government spokesperson said Ley was “conducting a number of meetings which reflect Australia’s ongoing concern about the draft world heritage listing”.

“Australia’s position remains that the draft listing process did not include the proper consultation with the relevant ‘state party’ (Australia), was not made on the basis of the latest information and did not follow the proper process,” they said.

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Photograph: Tim Robberts/Stone RF

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“The minister has had productive discussions with a number of country representatives during the trip to date. Minister Ley is keeping the Queensland government informed of her campaign regarding the listing process.”

The spokesperson said the Morrison government would work constructively with Queensland “to ensure that our joint efforts under the Reef 2050 plan, along with the latest reef science, are properly considered in any determination the World Heritage Committee makes on the status of the reef”.

The commonwealth was providing \$2.08bn of the \$3.05bn funding under the Reef 2050 plan and was “committed to ongoing funding strategies to protect the reef and its world heritage status”.

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[Lebanon](#)

Beirut police fire teargas at protest by relatives of blast victims

Protestors marched in a symbolic funeral procession with empty coffins to symbolise people killed in Lebanon blast

00:48

Police fire teargas at protestors outside interior minister's home in Beirut – video

Associated Press

Wed 14 Jul 2021 00.39 EDT

Lebanese riot police have fired teargas and scuffled with protesters and relatives of those who died in last year's Beirut port blast amid growing anger at what they call the obstruction of an investigation into one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history.

The unrest took place on Tuesday after hundreds of protesters gathered outside the home of Lebanon's caretaker interior minister, Mohamed Fehmi, weeks away from the first anniversary of the [Beirut explosion](#) approaches.

[Lebanon's government resigned](#) in response to the blast on 4 August 2020, and the country is still headed by a caretaker administration.

The protesters marched in a symbolic funeral procession with empty coffins to symbolise the victims. They then tossed the coffins into the yard of the building and pushed their way through security guards to hold a symbolic burial ceremony.

“He killed us another time,” said Tracy Naggear, whose three-year-old daughter was one of the youngest victims of the blast. She was referring to Fehmi’s decision to reject a request by the judge investigating the explosion to question one of Lebanon’s most senior generals, the head of general security Major General Abbas Ibrahim.



Relatives of the victims of Beirut Port blast gather in front of the house of Lebanon’s interior minister, Mohammad Fahmi during a protest demanding the fair conduct of the investigation. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The explosion at the port devastated the capital, killed more than 200 people and injured thousands. Hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive material used in fertilisers that had been improperly stored in the port for years ignited, causing the explosion. Many blame officials for keeping the explosive material stored at the port.

Investigating Judge Tarek Bitar said earlier this month he intends to pursue senior politicians and former and current security heads in the case, and requested their immunity be lifted so he can prosecute them.

Families of the victims and survivors praised the judge’s move as a bold

step. His predecessor leading the probe was removed after he accused two former ministers of negligence that led to the explosion.



A supporter of relatives of people who were killed in last year's massive blast at Beirut's seaport, left, sprays the word "Revolution" in Arabic on the shields of riot police. Photograph: Hussein Malla/AP

Naggear said the symbolic burial outside Fehmi's building was held at the scene of the "second crime" against the families seeking justice.

The gathering turned rowdy when dozens of protesters stormed Fehmi's building, breaking down two metal gates, and scuffled with riot police who beat them with clubs. Police fired teargas to push back against the protesters. The push set off pitched street battles with stone-throwing protesters. Many were injured and treated on the scene.

The protesters sprayed the word "killer" in red at the entrance of Fehmi's building as men pelted the building with tomatoes.

"Mohamed Fehmi, we will not leave you alone. Lift the immunity," said Ibrahim Hoteit, whose brother Tharwat, was killed in the blast.

Lebanon is also experiencing one of the worst economic crises in the last

150 years, according to the World Bank. Despite the economic meltdown, politicians have been unable to form a government to lead negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for a recovery package.

['This is the end of times': Lebanon struggles to find political path through its crisis](#)

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On Monday, the European Union said it hopes to develop the [legal framework for sanctions](#) targeting Lebanese leaders.

In a visit to Beirut port on Tuesday, a French cabinet minister criticised Lebanese leaders, warning them of the upcoming sanctions from Paris.

Repeated promises of reforms by Lebanon's political elite, which has run the country since the end of the 15-year civil war in 1990, never materialised. The ruling class, including some former warlords, has been blamed for decades of corruption and mismanagement that have brought Lebanon to near-bankruptcy.

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[Cuba](#)

Cuba protests: one man killed and more than 100 missing in historic unrest

A 36-year-old man died during clashes with police on the outskirts of Havana on Monday, says ministry

01:07

Cuba cracks down on protests as rallies spring up across US in support – video

[Tom Phillips](#) and [Ed Augustin](#) in Havana

Tue 13 Jul 2021 12.56 EDT

One person has died during demonstrations in [Cuba](#) over food shortages, high prices and other grievances against the government.

The interior ministry said on Tuesday that Diubis Laurencio Tejeda, 36, died during a clash on Monday between protesters and police in the Arroyo Naranjo municipality on the outskirts of Havana.

It said an unspecified number of people were arrested and there were some people injured, including some officers. The statement accused demonstrators of vandalising houses, setting fires and damaging power lines. It also alleged they attacked police and civilians with knives, stones and other objects.

The confirmation follows reports that scores of activists, protesters and journalists, including a reporter for one of Spain's leading newspapers, have been detained as Communist party security forces seek to smother [Sunday's historic flare-up of dissent](#).

Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty International's [Americas](#) director, said at least 140 Cubans were believed to have been detained or had disappeared in the aftermath of Cuba's largest demonstrations in decades.

[Why have Cuba's simmering tensions boiled over on to the streets?](#)

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“The idea is to punish those who dare to challenge the government … and send a message” that no further protests would be tolerated, said Guevara-Rosas, who said spontaneous and peaceful rallies had taken place in at least 48 separate locations, including Havana.

On Tuesday Spain's foreign minister, José Manuel Albares, demanded the immediate release of Camila Acosta, a Cuban journalist who reports for a Spanish newspaper and was among those [seized from their homes in the capital](#) early on Monday.

“Spain defends the right to demonstrate freely and peacefully and asks the Cuban authorities to respect it. We unconditionally defend human rights,” Albares said on Twitter amid reports that Acosta, who reports for the conservative ABC paper, would be charged with crimes against state security.

Earlier this month the group Reporters Without Borders named the Cuban president, Miguel Díaz-Canel, as one of the “[press freedom predators](#)” of 2021, alongside Nicaragua’s authoritarian leader, Daniel Ortega, and Brazil’s far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, and called Cuba “Latin America’s worst media freedom violator”.

On Monday Díaz-Canel painted the protests – which erupted as Cuba faces a severe economic crunch exacerbated by US sanctions and a Covid pandemic that has shattered the island’s tourist industry – as part of [a foreign plot to “fracture” the communist revolution](#) launched by Fidel Castro in 1959.



A special forces vehicle patrols downtown Havana on Monday. Photograph: Alexandre Meneghini/Reuters

Carolina Barrero, a Havana-based activist, said the wave of detentions were intended “to erase” Sunday’s demonstrations and ensure there was no repeat. “[This] is a dictatorship – this is what they do,” Barrero said from her home in Havana, where she has been under house arrest since June.

Guevara-Rosas said internet shutdowns meant it was hard to verify the precise scale of the crackdown on demonstrators, who had been protesting against shortages of food and medicine as well as one-party rule. But targets appeared to include prominent human rights campaigners, independent journalists and one of the leaders of the [Movimiento San Isidro](#), a collective of artists and activists that has been pushing for greater political freedoms.

Marta María Ramírez, 46, a feminist and LGBT activist, said she knew dozens of people who had been arrested, among them Gretel Medina, a young film director who is breastfeeding her baby son. “I’m very sad about the violent response from authorities,” Ramírez said.

“Police are repressive everywhere. But that’s not what’s proclaimed here – in Cuba they are supposed to be an organ of the people, they are supposed to protect the people.”

On Monday, Joe Biden called on Cuban authorities to respect citizen's rights, "including the right of peaceful protest and the right to freely determine their own future".

In [a televised broadcast](#) Cuba's foreign minister, Bruno Rodríguez, hit back, attacking the "extraordinary cynicism and hypocrisy" of US politicians. Rodríguez urged the US president to stop the "brutal repression" that US police forces inflict on African Americans and journalists.

Rodríguez also slammed Bolsonaro after he accused Cuba of "massacring" its people's freedoms. "Brazil's president should sort out his performance which has contributed to the deplorable death of hundreds of thousands of Brazilians from Covid ... and worry about the acts of corruption he is involved in rather than seeking to distract attention by casting a superficial eye on Cuba," Rodríguez tweeted.

Albares, who was appointed foreign minister in Spain's Socialist-led coalition government over the weekend, stopped short of condemning recent events in Cuba. In a statement released on Tuesday morning, his ministry urged Cuban authorities to "speed up the pace of reform" to help the island address the economic crisis and the lack of tourist revenues due to the Covid pandemic.

Cuban exiles in Miami announced seemingly half-baked plans to make [the 10-hour boat journey](#) from Florida to Cuba on Monday to offer the protesters supplies, support and perhaps even guns. The US coast guard indicated it was unlikely to allow flotillas to undertake the "dangerous and unforgiving" journey across the Florida straits and was monitoring attempts to make "unsafe and illegal" crossings.

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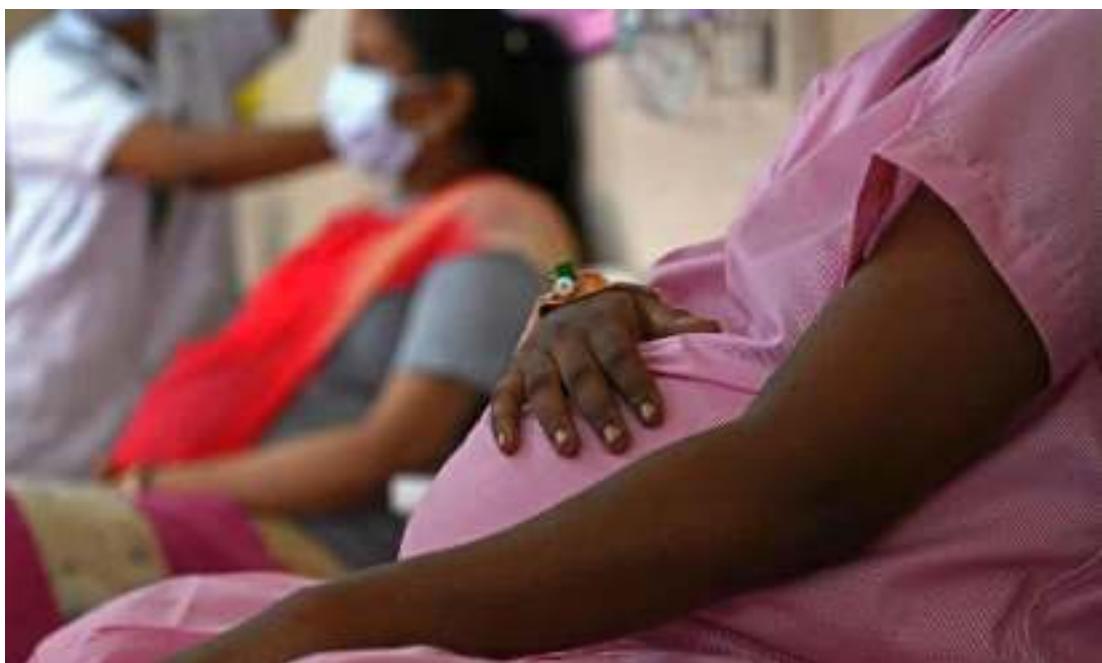
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[India](#)

India states considering two-child policy and incentives for sterilisation

Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Gujarat have announced draft legislation which would see anyone with more than two children denied benefits and in some cases jobs



Several of India's most populous states are considering bringing in a two-child policy and incentivising sterilisation. Photograph: Arun Sankar/AFP/Getty Images

Several of India's most populous states are considering bringing in a two-child policy and incentivising sterilisation. Photograph: Arun Sankar/AFP/Getty Images

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Delhi](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 23.44 EDT

Several Indian states are considering implementing a controversial two-child policy and incentivising sterilisation as a means of population control.

The state of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state with a population larger than Brazil, has announced draft legislation which would see anyone with more than two children denied state benefits, subsidies and government jobs. After a family has two children, there will also be incentives if one of the parents undergoes voluntary sterilisation.

The bill was put forward by the Uttar Pradesh state government, controlled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who also rule the central government. The state's chief minister Yogi Adityanath is considered one of the most hardline nationalist figures in the party, and will be up for re-election in the state elections next year.

[India's Covid vaccine rollout hit by hesitancy and supply snags](#)

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The state government said the bill was due to the “limited ecological and economic resources at hand” which mad it “necessary and urgent that the provision of the basic necessities of human life are accessible to all citizen”.

The north-eastern state of Assam, which is also ruled by the BJP, last month announced plans for a similar measure that would withhold government benefits from families with more than two children and the state of Gujarat, another BJP state, is also reported to be considering similar legislation.

When the parliament sessions begins this month, several BJP are also expected to introduce bills on the need for population control.

However, while India is expected to overtake China as the world's largest population in the next decade, many have questioned the necessity and motives of the proposed two-child policy in Indian states. Though the state of Uttar Pradesh has a large population of 240 million, research shows that the birthrate in the state nearly halved between 1993 and 2016 and continues to fall, with predictions that by 2025, the average number of children per mother will drop to 2.1.

[India's Covid vaccine rollout hit by hesitancy and supply snags](#)

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A similar trend of decline is being seen across India. A report by the National Family Health Survey in 2020 found that the Total Fertility Rate – the number of children born per woman – has decreased in 14 out of 17 States and is now at 2.1 or fewer children.

The decision by several BJP state governments to propose a two-child policy has been seen as politically motivated and a means to appeal to Hindu voters, particularly in Uttar Pradesh where there will be a state election next year. In Uttar Pradesh and states such as Assam, which have large Muslim populations, there is a widespread but unsubstantiated belief that Muslim families are overproducing, using up valuable resources and putting the Hindu population at risk of becoming a minority.

A two-child policy has already been implemented in various forms in 12 states across India, but four states have since revoked it over lack of any evidence of impact. Campaigners have warned that the policy disproportionately effects women, especially single mothers, and urged the government to focus on contraception and education means of population control.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Masks guidance for England will be ‘clear and strong’, says minister

Edward Argar rejects criticism that public could get mixed messages as Covid safety rules are lifted

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Passengers wearing masks at Waterloo station in London. Virtually all Covid restrictions will be removed on 19 July. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

Passengers wearing masks at Waterloo station in London. Virtually all Covid restrictions will be removed on 19 July. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

[Peter Walker](#) Political correspondent

[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 12 Jul 2021 04.41 EDT

People will be given “clear and strong guidance” about wearing masks even when the bulk of Covid rules are lifted across [England](#), a health minister has said, rejecting criticism from a leading scientist that the public risked getting mixed messages on the issue.

The junior health minister Edward Argar stressed the robustness of guidance about mask use in public spaces, continuing the toughening of official language ahead of Boris Johnson’s announcement about reopening later on Monday.

In a Downing Street press conference expected at 5pm the prime minister [is set to confirm](#) that England will take the final step in reopening on 19 July, removing virtually all legal restrictions, despite fast-rising Covid infection rates.

Argar told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “When we move to step 4 we will see the falling away of legal obligations and legal restrictions towards personal and corporate responsibility, based on clear and strong guidance, and people will make their own judgments.”

In a later interview with ITV’s Good Morning Britain, Argar said people would be given “clear guidance, unambiguous guidance” on continued mask use.

With charities representing people who are clinically vulnerable to Covid, or have suppressed immune systems, [expressing alarm](#) that a mass drop-off in mask use could effectively confine them to their homes, ministers have in recent days said new guidance would urge the public to still wear masks in crowded indoor places such as trains and shops.

But Prof Peter Openshaw, a lung immunology specialist at Imperial College London and a member of the government’s Nervtag (New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group), said there was a risk of mixed messages.

Asked on the Today programme if face coverings should be mandatory, he said: “I think it is very difficult to say that it is up to people to choose whether to wear face masks when it is not only protecting yourself but also protecting other people.

“It’s so much more straightforward to try to get face masks used in dangerous situations if there is some kind of compulsion behind it.”

Openshaw added: “I really don’t see why people are reluctant to wear face coverings, it is quite clear that they do greatly reduce transmission. Vaccines are fantastic but you have to give them time to work and in the meantime keeping up all those measures which we have learned to reduce the transmission is to me really vital.”

02:38

How your mask protects other people – video explainer

His comments were echoed by Dr Mike Tildesley, from the University of Warwick and a member of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (Spi-M), who said there had been mixed messaging over face masks.

He told BBC Breakfast that “some ministers have come out and said they’ll be very happy not to wear their face masks and then we’ve had others, even in the last couple of days, saying ‘we would still advise you to wear them in these settings’.

“I think it’s quite confusing actually for people to know what the right thing to do is. I think all that we can do is take a sort of appropriate approach where we look at the situation and sort of weigh up the risk ourselves, and I hope that enough people do that going forward that we don’t see a big surge.”

Asked about Openshaw’s comments, Argar argued the public would not be confused about masks.

He said: “I don’t think that the British people will struggle to look at the guidance and form their own commonsense judgments. I don’t think it will

introduce confusion.”

Ministerial language on masks has notably changed in recent days. Just over a week ago, Robert Jenrick, the communities secretary, [said he would abandon mask use](#), while the health secretary, Sajid Javid, said he would not necessarily wear one even if it was recommended, for example by a train company, if the carriage he was travelling in was quiet.

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In contrast, Argar said he “probably would” wear a mask on an empty train if this was required by the train operator.

Argar told Today that with the advent of school holidays in England, summer weather and the extent of vaccination rates, it was the right time to reopen.

“I think we have to be clear about this, that if not now, when?” he said. “We want to see these restrictions relaxed. Yes, we’re seeing the infection rates go up, and hospitalisations and death rates will go up, but there is nowhere

near that direct and strong correlation there was, say, back in January when we had equivalent levels of infection rates.”

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Coronavirus

UK Covid: Johnson urges people to take unlocking ‘as slowly as we can’ amid 34,471 new cases – as it happened

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Covid unlocking on 19 July must come with a warning, says Johnson

Ministers are told easing of restrictions could be accompanied by 2m new cases in coming weeks

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Boris Johnson: ‘We must all take responsibility so we don’t undo our progress.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Wire/Rex

Boris Johnson: ‘We must all take responsibility so we don’t undo our progress.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Wire/Rex

[Peter Walker](#) and [Ian Sample](#)

Sun 11 Jul 2021 17.30 EDT

Boris Johnson has said caution is “absolutely vital” before the abandonment of virtually all formal Covid restrictions as ministers toughen their language amid expectations of soaring infection rates.

The Guardian understands that ministers have been told to brace for at least one to two million new cases of coronavirus in the coming weeks, though the vaccination programme means far smaller proportions of those infected will be hospitalised and die than in previous waves.

The move into the final stage of unlocking on 19 July, to be announced by the prime minister on Monday afternoon, has been billed as the moment for people to rely on their own judgment over coronavirus precautions, rather than official prescriptions.

And while Johnson will outline the end of virtually all statutory restrictions on everything from business capacity to distancing and mask use, people will still be urged to wear masks in crowded enclosed spaces, with similar vigilance expected over the swift return to workplaces.

The move “must come with a warning”, said Johnson, who will host a Downing Street press conference at the same time as Sajid Javid, the health secretary, briefs MPs in the Commons.

“Cases will rise as we unlock, so as we confirm our plans today, our message will be clear. Caution is absolutely vital, and we must all take responsibility so we don’t undo our progress, ensuring we continue to protect our NHS.”

There has been a marked shift in the tone taken by ministers on the subject of mask-wearing amid government jitters about the risks of the so-called “big bang” approach to unlocking.

Nadhim Zahawi, the vaccines minister, stressed the need for the public to remain “cautious and careful”. He told Sky News: “The guidelines that we will set out tomorrow will demonstrate that, including guidelines that people are expected to wear masks in indoor enclosed spaces, and of course to remain vigilant.”

His comments contrast with the tone taken a week earlier by Robert Jenrick, the communities secretary, who said he would abandon mask use when the restrictions ended, adding: “I don’t particularly want to wear a mask.”

Two days later, Javid said that while he would carry a mask with him, he would not necessarily wear one even if it was recommended, for example by a train company, if the carriage he was travelling in was quiet.

The comments prompted alarm from groups representing people particularly vulnerable to Covid or who have compromised immune systems, such as blood cancer patients, with warnings that a wholesale ditching of masks by the public could mean such groups are effectively confined to their homes.

Another potential change is expected to be renewed caution over a move away from people working from home when they can, an area identified by public health experts as a potentially important factor in determining whether reopening leads to a significant rise in Covid cases.

While decisions about where people should work will be up to individual companies after 19 July, Dr Susan Hopkins, the incident director for Covid at Public Health [England](#), said people should aim for “a cautious return to the office” even once case rates start to fall.

“If you are able to do your business effectively from home, then I think over the next four to six weeks, we should try our best to do that,” she told Times Radio.

Johnson is to stress that even if cases approach the 100,000-a-day level predicted by Javid, a record for the pandemic, the fact that almost 87% of UK adults have received at least one vaccination, and just under 66% have had two, will greatly curtail levels of serious illness and death.

Downing Street’s argument against waiting for even higher vaccination levels is that 19 July is close to the start of English school holidays, meaning that one route of transmission will be curbed for six weeks, and will increase pressure on the NHS at a time when it is not also tackling [winter issues like seasonal flu](#).

Ministers accept that the approach represents a leap into the unknown, as younger people – many of whom have not yet received two vaccine doses – could still get longer-term Covid symptoms even if they do not fall seriously ill.

Labour has called for more mitigation measures, such as moves to help hospitality businesses improve ventilation, and mandating mask use on public transport and shops.

Kate Green, the shadow education secretary, told Sky she understood that metropolitan mayors Andy Burnham and Sadiq Khan would make masks compulsory on trams in Manchester and on the tube in London.

Another issue for ministers to consider is the strain on the NHS; a number of hospitals [have already had to cancel operations](#) because of the twin pressures of increased Covid patients and staff being obliged to self-isolate. Javid said on Sunday that the scale of the Covid-created backlog could see waiting lists [rise to 13m in the coming months](#).

Speaking to the Sunday Telegraph, he said the situation was “going to get a lot worse before it gets better”.

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UK business confidence jumps ahead of 19 July lockdown lifting

Survey shows firms most optimistic since 2005, as hiring intentions reach a record high despite a surge in Covid cases

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Covid restrictions are expected to end in England from 19 July, with employees allowed to return to the workplace from this date. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

Covid restrictions are expected to end in England from 19 July, with employees allowed to return to the workplace from this date. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

[Graeme Wearden](#)

Mon 12 Jul 2021 01.01 EDT

UK business confidence has jumped as firms anticipate the lifting of lockdown restrictions later this month, despite concerns over the rise in Covid-19 infections.

A survey by accountancy and business advisory firm BDO found that firms were their most optimistic since 2005 in June. Manufacturing optimism rose sharply, due to improved global economic outlook driven by [the Covid-19 vaccine rollout this year](#).

“Businesses are clearly looking forward to the lifting of restrictions on the 19 July. After a gruelling year of unpredictable change, the ending of restrictions is timely, although rising Covid-19 cases still leave an element of uncertainty,” said Kaley Crossthwaite, partner at BDO.

[UK food worker shortages push prices up and risk Christmas turkey supplies](#)
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Companies also reported that inflation pressures had hit a four-year high, with supply chain disruption due to Brexit, the pandemic, and [the Suez Canal blockage](#) earlier this year pushing up costs.

Two-thirds of UK private sector firms expect an increase in business activity over the coming year, according to a poll of 1,400 businesses by Accenture and IHS Markit UK. Just 9% predicted a fall, giving the highest business expectations reading in six years.

Hiring intentions among businesses rose to a record high, as firms anticipated a robust recovery. But some firms fear recruitment plans could be hindered by a lack of available labour, particularly in sectors that [rely on a large pool of EU workers](#).

[England's 19 July reopening may boost UK plc but a longer-term approach is needed](#)
[Read more](#)

“Despite continued uncertainty, it is hugely encouraging that confidence remains high among British businesses,” said Rachel Barton, strategy & consulting lead at Accenture UK & Ireland.

“However, the most positive signal is that the confidence appears to be translating into action, with companies now hiring and investment plans at a high point.”

Firms are also expecting to raise wages, with a balance of +70% of firms anticipating rising staff costs. Many also plan to pass this on to customers, with a record net balance of +48% of businesses plan to raise their selling prices. That could push consumer price inflation higher over the coming months.

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Hygiene theatre: how excessive cleaning gives us a false sense of security



‘Instead of looking at how many hand sanitisers there, people should be looking at reassurances around the ventilation.’ Composite: Getty

‘Instead of looking at how many hand sanitisers there, people should be looking at reassurances around the ventilation.’ Composite: Getty

Covid-19 is a mainly airborne disease. So does our endless disinfecting and hand sanitising serve any purpose – or could it be worse than useless?



Sirin Kale

Mon 12 Jul 2021 05.30 EDT

Claudia, a 26-year-old beauty worker, dreads it when her clients ask to go to the toilet. “It’s a whole other thing to clean,” she says. “They could have touched anything in there. I have to wipe down the whole thing with antibacterial spray and wipes.”

It is her job to maintain stringent cleaning protocols at the London skincare clinic where she works. When clients arrive for their appointments, Claudia checks them in, offers them a drink – the clinic only uses disposable cups or plastic water bottles – and takes them through to the treatment room.

Once her colleague is performing their treatment, Claudia begins furiously scrubbing every surface the customer could conceivably have touched.

After the customer leaves, Claudia scours the treatment room and replaces all the towels before wiping down the pump dispenser on the antibacterial hand gel visitors use when arriving. Then, when a new customer arrives, the process begins again. “I’ve had a few clients saying they feel really safe in here,” Claudia says, “because they know we are really careful and cautious about sanitising everything.”

Which makes it strange that the one measure that would contribute most to the safety of the clients and workers in Claudia's clinic isn't being implemented: ventilation.

Covid-19 is an airborne disease that is principally transmitted through respiratory droplets, as well as aerosols, that can linger in the air for many minutes after an infected person has left a room, and travel metres in distance. The most effective way to minimise the risk of Covid transmission in indoor settings is to open as many windows and doors as possible and mandate mask use.

But, although a window at the back of the clinic is open, the front door is closed. "We can't have the door at the front open," Claudia says, "because we're on the main road. It's more the security element than anything. Someone could just walk straight in ... it's probably not as well ventilated as we would like."

What Claudia is performing on behalf of the customers who frequent her skincare clinic is "hygiene theatre". The term was first coined by the Atlantic writer Derek Thompson [in a July 2020 essay](#), in which he defined hygiene theatre as Covid safety protocols "that make us feel safer, but don't actually do much to reduce risk, even as more dangerous activities are still allowed".

Hygiene theatre is plastic facial visors that do not protect wearers from breathing in infected air or contaminating the people around them. It is single-use cutlery and disposable menus in restaurants and shields between tables. It is staff fastidiously cleaning communal touchpoints in pubs while maskless groups chant football songs at full volume. It is hazmat suit-wearing officials fumigating entire streets with disinfectant. It is gyms that require people to wipe down every piece of equipment they touch, but do not make them wear masks. It is quarantining your post by the front door and wiping down your groceries with bleach. All well-intentioned, but mostly ineffectual, gestures that make us feel safe, but do not keep us safe from the threat posed by Covid-19.

As England hurtles towards the removal of virtually all Covid restrictions on 19 July, with the other devolved nations likely to follow, albeit at a more

cautious pace, a mantra of [personal responsibility is being promoted by the government](#). Masks will be voluntary; social distancing scrapped; businesses no longer under any obligation to increase the ventilation in their premises.

But infections are rising exponentially, and only just over [half of the total UK population have received two doses of the vaccine](#). From now on, the individual decisions we take about how to stay safe in public spaces will have powerful real-world consequences. As we enter the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are rushing towards a dangerous new phase in which hygiene theatre can do even more damage than it has.

Hygiene theatre builds on a concept originated by the security expert Bruce Schneier in his 2003 book, Beyond Fear. Schneier coined the term “security theatre” to describe the safety measures implemented at airports after the 9/11 terror attacks, such as banning nail scissors and cigarette lighters. In reality, these measures were pointless: a complicated charade to reassure nervous passengers rather than anything grounded in reality. They also came at a huge cost to taxpayers – the US has spent more than [\\$100bn on aviation security](#) since 9/11.

Schneier agrees that Covid-19 has ushered in an era of hygiene theatre. “Like security theatre,” he says, “hygiene theatre comes from bad risk analysis – really, from ignorance.” At the beginning of the pandemic, Schneier says, this was understandable. “Nobody knew anything,” he says. “We were all confused about what the right thing was to do. We legitimately didn’t know.”



According to the CDC, the chance of contracting Covid-19 from a single infected surface is less than 1 in 10,000 Photograph: Peter Dazeley/Getty Images

In those fear-filled days of February and March 2020, many experts and healthcare authorities believed that Covid-19 was primarily transmitted through droplets, through skin-on-skin contact, such as shaking hands, being coughed on by an infected person or touching something they had recently touched. (Infection via contaminated surfaces is known as fomite transmission.) Academics told the public not to bother wearing masks, as the virus was not airborne, so masks would be futile.

This is why all the public health messaging from this time was about minimising direct contact. “Hands, face, space,” we repeated like a magic spell, as we shopped in supermarkets without face masks, pausing in poorly ventilated aisles to sanitise our hands. (Masks were not mandated on public transport and hospitals in England until 15 June, and in shops from 24 July.) Cabinet ministers at daily coronavirus press conferences persistently reminded the public to wash their hands.

Lost in this was any recognition of the dangers of airborne Covid-19 transmission. “Basic hand hygiene,” says Dr Christine Peters, a consultant medical microbiologist and virologist at Glasgow NHS trust. “That message

got out very early, and that became the fixation of the public and politicians. But it was to the detriment of the other important message, which is: think about the air.” The World Health Organization (WHO) [did not acknowledge the risk of airborne transmission until July 2020](#); in the US, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) acknowledged that fomite transmission of Covid-19 “isn’t thought to be the main way the virus spreads” in [May 2020](#), and [updated its guidance](#) to include airborne transmission in October 2020. The UK government first acknowledged the risk of airborne Covid-19 transmission in about [November 2020](#), although it was not until [March 2021](#), more than a year since the pandemic first hit UK shores, that it finally published guidance on ventilation in indoor settings.

According to the CDC, the chance of contracting Covid-19 [from a single infected surface](#) is less than 1 in 10,000. And yet we remain obsessed with fomite transmission of Covid-19, as do our elected leaders. In June, a glove-wearing Boris Johnson [was filmed wiping down a plastic chair](#), in a worrying indication of the prime minister’s lack of understanding. And when the G7 met in Cornwall, news cameras [broadcast footage of hotel staff wiping down railings](#) outside the hotel hosting the summit, in a bit of high-profile hygiene theatre.

Even at the government press conference announcing the relaxation of restrictions on 5 July, the chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, [talked about handwashing](#), but not ventilation. “One of the problems we had from the beginning, that was critical at the time and actually still is critical, is senior people did not understand well enough the problem of … it being airborne,” [said the former government aide](#) Dominic Cummings in a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it excerpt from his marathon select committee appearance in May.

For some people who are susceptible to obsessive-compulsive disorder, it has been devastating

How to explain this continued misapprehension? “Shakespeare puts it well,” says Dr Emanuel Goldman, a microbiologist at Rutgers. “What is done cannot be undone. There was a great preoccupation with fomite transmission at the beginning of the pandemic. And that stuck.” Goldman was a leading voice challenging hygiene theatre throughout the pandemic. In July 2020, he

wrote a sharp commentary for the Lancet Infectious Diseases, [calling into question the](#) then-received wisdom that Covid-19 could be transmitted by infected surfaces. “When the pandemic started,” he says, “my mother-in-law, who lives with us, was saying that we needed to wash the groceries and disinfect the mail. As a scientist, it seemed extreme, so I decided to look at the literature. And when I did, I was horrified to see that the basis for those interventions was very weak.”

Since then, Goldman has campaigned for an end to hygiene theatre, publishing in medical journals and reviewing the academic literature on fomite transmission. “The battle continues,” he says, telling me that the WHO continues to overemphasise the risk of Covid-19 transmission [from contaminated surfaces](#). In the UK, a similar role has been played by the “fresh air” campaign, run by a group of frontline NHS workers arguing for greater recognition of the dangers of airborne Covid transmission in hospital settings, and better masks for NHS staff.

Many would argue that hygiene theatre is benign. Public toilets are cleaner than they have ever been. “One legacy of the pandemic is that general hygiene levels will increase,” says Dr Eilir Hughes of the NHS fresh air campaign. “I don’t like security theatre when it’s expensive,” says Schneier, “and the government is making the taxpayer pay for it. But if it’s someone wiping down their groceries because it makes them feel better, go to town.” Peters is sanguine about cleaning protocols in healthcare settings in particular. “Trying to maintain a clean environment in a hospital setting is fair enough.”

But hygiene theatre can lull people into a false sense of security. “I roll my eyes when I see people walking around in visors,” sighs Hughes, “because it’s such a shame.” There have been [Covid outbreaks in restaurants](#) where workers used only plastic visors, instead of face masks. (After one such outbreak in a Swiss hotel, [local health officials cautioned the public against wearing facial visors](#).) Hughes feels similarly about hand sanitiser. “It gives people this sense of an invisible cloak.”



‘I’ve seen a lot of people who’ve had really bad dermatitis because of this obsession with hand hygiene.’ Photograph: Tahreer Photography/Getty Images

Hygiene theatre can be actively dangerous because it prevents people from making informed choices about the levels of risk they’re willing to accept in their lives. “Your feelings of safety have to be science-based,” says Peters. “People can make their own judgment calls about the risks they are willing to tolerate, but the key is for people to understand how Covid spreads.” She fears that hygiene theatre causes people to avoid taking the mitigating measures that actually would reduce risk, such as opening windows or investing in high-efficiency particulate air purifiers. “In a restaurant,” Peters says, “instead of looking at how many hand sanitisers there are on the table, people should be looking at reassurances around the air exchanges.” With all restrictions on indoor contact likely to cease in England on 19 July, correctly assessing the level of risk in any given setting will be crucial. In short, it’s time to finally do away with hygiene theatre.

In addition, all those antibacterial wipes and single-use plastics are environmentally ruinous. “It’s the waste we’re creating that I find annoying, more than anything else,” Claudia says. Goldman says that public institutions are spending vast sums on disinfectants and cleaners. “For a year, the New York subway closed every night for deep cleaning,” he says.

“That cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Money doesn’t grow on trees for public institutions.”

Transport for London installed more than 200 ultraviolet sanitising devices on [110 escalators on the London underground](#), even as the transport authority [has to find £900m of savings or new income](#) over the coming year. Vendors of sanitiser, antibacterial wipes and cleaning products post record profits: the manufacturers of Dettol and Lysol recorded their highest-ever sales growth in 2020, largely due to the pandemic.

It kind of makes you feel safer. Even though it’s completely illogical

Hughes is a practising GP. “I’ve seen a lot of people who’ve had really bad dermatitis and skin irritation because of this obsession with hand hygiene. And for people who are susceptible to obsessive-compulsive disorder, particularly around hygiene, it’s been absolutely devastating,” he says. For people with [multiple chemical sensitivity](#) (MCS), too, an extreme sensitivity to fragranced products – such as disinfectants, soaps or detergents – the hygiene theatre of the Covid-19 pandemic has been a nightmare.

“It’s unbearable,” sighs Anna Meyerson, a 59-year-old dentist from Westchester, Pennsylvania. First diagnosed with MCS in 2016, Meyerson has been essentially housebound for years. “There’s only one place I can eat near me,” she says, “and it took me years to get them to stop using air fresheners.” But the pandemic has exacerbated her condition. Before, her husband could do the food shopping without incident. “Now, with Covid, they fumigate and disinfect everything,” she says, “and that permeates my husband’s clothes and makes me sick. Before, when he came back from the store, it would be fine. Now he has to shower.” She is desperate for hygiene theatre to stop. “They are killing me with all these chemicals.”

How to explain this befuddling attachment to hygiene theatre when we know that it does not measurably keep us safe, comes at an exorbitant cost and can be measurably damaging to some people? “People are keeping it up because it’s largely self-soothing,” says Schneier. “This is how I *feel* better.”

“Even though I know in my head that wiping everything down makes no difference,” says Claudia, “it kind of makes you feel safer. Even though it’s completely illogical … it’s like, peace of mind.”

At its heart, hygiene theatre is a perhaps inevitable response to the worst public health crisis in a century. Because when events career out of control, humans respond the only way they know how: by attempting to impose order upon chaos, one Dettol wipe at a time.

Some names have been changed.

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Over three-quarters of Britons re-evaluate their lives during Covid

Exclusive: switching jobs, moving house and even breaking up – poll shows Covid has changed our focus

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Dan Mountford who quit his job as a teacher to become a baker. Photograph: christian sinibaldi/The Guardian

Dan Mountford who quit his job as a teacher to become a baker. Photograph: christian sinibaldi/The Guardian

[Robyn Vinter](#)

Sun 11 Jul 2021 19.01 EDT

For 28-year-old Londoner Dan Mountford, baking had always been a hobby.

But a year ago, at the height of the Covid pandemic, he quit his job as a science teacher to pursue this passion.

“I wanted to do something that I am really passionate about and since I began working as a baker I take enormous satisfaction in coming to work every day, knowing I’ll be doing something I am genuinely interested in,” he said.

Mountford is one of the more than three-quarters of people in the UK who say the coronavirus pandemic has made them re-evaluate the most important aspects of their lives.

More than a third of the 2,000 people surveyed for the thinktank Global Future said they had thought about changing jobs, while a separate third had looked at moving house. One in 10 people said they had looked at moving abroad and just under one in 10 had considered breaking up with their partner or starting a new relationship.

Mountford said the change was about doing something he really enjoyed.

“There’s zero bureaucracy, I don’t have to answer any emails,” he said. “There’s none of that kind of stuff that I was frustrated about with teaching.

“I was fed up with the [pressure put on teachers](#) and the bureaucratic elements of the job, and since I’ve left, I’ve seen this pattern still affecting people in the profession.”

His decision came at a cost, though. He now gets up very early in the morning, works weekends and unsociable hours and took a considerable pay cut.

“Some people were shocked that I decided to take such a large cut in salary, but others understand the importance of me doing something I love and support the decision,” he said.

Though lots of people will be dreaming about a drastic move, unlike Mountford, the poll found 80% of people had done little or nothing to achieve change, partly as a result of social and economic obstacles.

[Smile! Could the pandemic lead to happier times?](#)

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Two in five of those surveyed claimed money concerns were preventing them making changes and 31% cited a lack of opportunity. Young people aged 18 to 25 were most likely to be upset if they could not make changes in their life after lockdown.

Despite this, 40% of people said they would miss at least one element of lockdown life.

Gurnek Bains, a cultural psychologist, founder of Global Future and author of the report How Covid Changed Our Minds, said the pandemic had been a wake-up call for many people and he urged the government and employers to put in place structures to help people make changes to their daily lives

“The pandemic forced us to confront the big questions about what we do, where we live and who we love,” said Bains.

“The problem is that the British people have changed, but Britain has not. Structural barriers continue to restrain our freedom to act on our dreams.

“There is a risk of a dangerous rift between people’s desires and realities. As many people remain immobilised by socioeconomic barriers, we could face a dangerous tidal wave of dissatisfaction just as lockdown lifts.

“We particularly need to support young people whose lives have been most acutely affected by the pandemic, and who are boldly asking these existential questions.”

Separate polling from Aviva found almost half of employees had become less career-focused as a result of the pandemic, up from a third in August 2020.

The insurer’s research over 18 months found that 44% of people said they were unable to switch off from work “as many employers are seen to encourage an always-on, ever-present culture”.

More than a third felt their work-life balance had improved during the pandemic, yet one in five had been negatively affected.

The research also exposes the gender divisions behind many people's pandemic experience, as women are more concerned about burnout and less likely to feel that hard work entitles them to take "me" time back during office hours.

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Freedom day? Boris Johnson faces a tough call as Covid cases soar

The prime minister seems intent on lifting England's remaining Covid restrictions on 19 July. But many in the NHS fear it could be overwhelmed – and tourist hotspots are fearful too

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Under pressure: Boris Johnson wants to get back to normal, but can we?
Photograph: Reuters

Under pressure: Boris Johnson wants to get back to normal, but can we?
Photograph: Reuters

[Toby Helm](#), [Rachel Stevenson](#) and [James Tapper](#)

Sun 11 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

With foreign holidays still in doubt and Cornwall filling up by the day, Jessica Webb has a unique perspective on “freedom day”. With her sister, Naomi, and her father, Spence, she helps run Falmouth Surf School and Watersports on Maenporth beach. Bookings for surf lessons are strong, and Jessica, 38, has started running yoga classes on paddleboards anchored in the cove to cope with excess demand.

She is also a part-time healthcare assistant in the A&E department at Cornwall’s only major hospital, in Treliiske. “Even now, before the summer holidays have started, we don’t have enough staff in the hospital, people are waiting hours at A&E, the ambulances are all parked up outside,” she says. “There’s just so little capacity and so few beds – even for the people that live here all the time, let alone all the holidaymakers.

“But my family business needs tourists. So I see it from all sides – the pressure on services but also the small, local businesses like ours that need visitors. As long as people are a bit careful, it will be a great summer.”

Others visiting the sheltered bay feel the same mix of excitement, tempered with some trepidation. Ray and Olwen Woolcock, 66 and 63, have not had the best weather for their two-week campervan trip around Cornwall but are still enjoying the beach under a grey sky. “We’ve both been double vaccinated,” says Olwen. “We are still being very careful though. I do wonder whether it’s a good idea to let all the restrictions go overnight – are we going to end up regretting it?”



Padstow in Cornwall. Some local businesses fear the county's only major hospital could be overrun this summer. Photograph: Michael Brooks/Alamy

Maenporth's Life's a Beach cafe is busy all year round but has already had to close for eight weeks since the May half-term due to Covid, after cases began to rise rapidly again. James Wright, 24, who owns the cafe with his family, then caught Covid himself, which meant another complete closure. "It's become increasingly difficult with staff having to isolate," says Wright. Most of his employees are young, and while many have had one vaccination dose, very few have had two.

Along the coast on a bend of the Helford river, near Falmouth, Martin Barlow's family has owned the Budock Vean hotel since 1987. But they have never faced a summer season like this before.

As Covid cases have skyrocketed once more, almost half the hotel's kitchen staff have been isolating at the same time, having been pinged by the [NHS](#) contact-tracing app.

"I was pot washing in the kitchen a couple of days ago, I've been night portering, I've been waiting tables in the restaurant, and I'll be back pot washing again tonight," he says. "It's been extremely challenging and I have to make difficult decisions every day – staff shortages are also hitting our

supply chains too. This season is a fantastic opportunity for people to come to Cornwall. But the situation is precarious at the moment, and there is the potential for chaos with the isolation regime as it stands.”

On Monday, as Covid cases soar again, [Boris Johnson](#) – under intense pressure from many of his own MPs to get the country back to normal – is expected to confirm plans for England’s “freedom day” on 19 July. He has already delayed the removal of most restrictions once, pushing the date back from 21 June, so the political heat is on.

At a [press conference last week](#) he emphasised that the pandemic was “far from over” and that caution should still be the watchword. But his past rhetoric and his populist instincts have, in the view of many other politicians, health experts and scientists, left him taking the wrong route along his Covid roadmap at a time when danger signals are flashing everywhere on the dashboard. “I think they are mad to press ahead with all this,” said a senior shadow minister. Yet Johnson’s view, and that of the new health secretary Sajid Javid, is that mass vaccinations have broken the link between infections and deaths, so it is prudent to announce a return to life and business as we used to know both.



London diners during eat out to help out last year. Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

But doctors, scientists and the doubters in parliament are all asking the question: will doing so push up Covid cases to intolerable levels that will swamp the NHS again? And out there in the world of business and leisure, will there be enough people available to work? While businesses are desperate for normality, many cannot find sufficient staff, either because they are ill or self-isolating or because, in the case of many EU workers, they have left the country since Brexit.

Covid is again causing nationwide disruption to hospitals, restaurants, warehouses, airports, caravan parks and laundry services. On Friday, the UK recorded another 35,707 new Covid-19 infections, the highest number of daily cases since 22 January. On Saturday [the government's coronavirus dashboard](#) also recorded a further 34 deaths within 28 days of a positive test, bringing the total so far to 128,399, showing the link with deaths is by no means entirely severed. But for the PM, the politics – the need to avoid another monumental U-turn – look set to prevail.

From the 19th of this month, all English premises currently closed, including nightclubs, will be able to reopen with no limits on numbers. Social distancing will be no more, face masks will no longer be mandatory and fines for not wearing them will go. The guidance to work from home where possible will end. Personal responsibility and judgment will replace government rules.

“It is a fundamental shift of emphasis,” says a senior government source. “Individuals, not government, will decide.”

Further easing will follow. In [England](#), from 16 August, those fully vaccinated or under 18 will not need to self-isolate following close contact with someone who has Covid.

To many experts it seems just too risky. Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, chair of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, said she was “profoundly concerned” about the entire strategy. The academy released a statement on Friday warning things “will get worse before they get better”, in terms of the pandemic. “There seems to be a misapprehension that life will return to normal, and that we can throw away all the precautions, and frankly, that would be dangerous.”



Social distancing measures are about to be lifted on public transport, but many think they should remain. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

The desire to be free and have fun may also be restricted by growing labour shortages. About 600,000 people working in pubs, restaurants, hotels and bars were isolating last week, according to Kate Nicholls, the chief executive of UKHospitality. Huge numbers of people have been deleting the NHS app to avoid the same fate, and ministers are now looking at ways to reduce its responsiveness as they scramble to open up in a way that does not itself cripple the economy.

“We are seeing a high proportion of our workforce contacted by test and trace and advised to self-isolate, and it’s increasing at a quite dramatic rate,” Nicholls said. “At the end of last week, it was about one in five. And at the end of this week, it was about a third of workers, on a rolling basis, that are just unavailable for work due to self-isolation.”

The NHS is struggling to cope too. More Covid cases are among younger people who are not fully vaccinated. Doctors complain that some coming into hospitals already think they no longer have to wear masks, while the prevailing view among medics is that they should remain mandatory. “It is appalling,” said a senior consultant at a London hospital on Friday. “We are inviting the virus to spread among the very people we need to protect.”

Saffron Cordery, deputy chief executive of NHS Providers, said: “For the last couple of weeks, we have heard increasing numbers of trust leaders saying that they are really worried by the numbers of staff who are having to isolate because they’ve been pinged by the NHS test-and-trace app. Obviously that has an impact on what trusts are able to do.”

“We want to see the government bring forward the date allowing NHS staff not to isolate if they’ve been double jabbed. That’s 16 August but we’d like it from 19 July. It’s really, really important – let’s not add to the mix of challenges the NHS is facing.”

We’re very worried about tourist hotspots, there’re going to be too many people trying to cram into too small an area

Ros Pritchard

This week, a new NHS bill, which will lead to another huge reorganisation of the service, will have its second reading in the Commons. Labour will oppose it, saying it is the last thing needed when the pandemic is still raging and there is a [huge backlog of 5.3 million non-Covid operations](#) to catch up on.

Those in the NHS system believe the effects of the vaccine should not be exaggerated and that big risks remain. “Although vaccines have weakened the link (with serious Covid cases and deaths), it’s not completely broken,” Cordery added. “Some people need hospital treatment, and not all of them are people who haven’t had the vaccine.”

There are particular worries that hospitals in seaside areas will struggle to meet demand during the summer holidays. Normally the rush of domestic visitors is offset by the numbers going abroad. “We’re very worried about tourism in the tourist hotspots this summer because there are going to be too many people trying to cram into too small an area in too short a time,” said Ros Pritchard, director general of the British Holiday & Home Parks Association.

Problems with staff were evident. “Companies that do linen are failing to get the staff or their staff are having to self-isolate,” Pritchard added. “And I was

talking to one business owner who was asking customers to bring their own bedlinen because his supplier had let him down.”

This weekend, Johnson is being pulled in opposite directions by public opinion, by businesses desperate to make money but terrified of another lockdown, and by his own backbenchers.

Tory MP Dr Dan Poulter, who also works as an NHS psychiatrist and has done during the pandemic, said that while the country needed to learn to live with the virus it should not throw caution to the wind. “The prudent thing would be to continue to use face masks and enforce social distancing where possible, for example in hospitals and on public transport,” he said.

Today’s Opinium poll for the *Observer* shows that 50% of UK adults think the lifting of restrictions should be postponed beyond 19 July, while a third (31%) want it to go ahead. Only 10% think it should have happened earlier. Approval of the government’s Covid handling sits at its lowest level since late February. The political danger for Johnson is clear.

In another of the country’s tourist hot spots, Clarrie O’Callaghan, who owns the Rattle Owl restaurant in York, views the coming week more with dread than expectation.

“If the last 15 months haven’t already left hospitality on its knees, getting through the next few months will cripple already fragile businesses. Our day-to-day reality balances the fear of a test-and-trace ping, or multiple pings, with how can we manage the covers we’ve got booked in.

“Do we have to close off tables, reduce bookings or indeed close the restaurant completely? We have done all of those things in the last 15 days and we are not the only ones. The financial impact is devastating.”

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Ugandan minister blames west for Covid vaccine shortage

Chris Baryomunsi says Uganda unable to obtain more shots because ‘western world has focused on its population’

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A woman receives a coronavirus vaccination at the Kololo airstrip in Kampala, Uganda. Photograph: Nicholas Bamulanzeki/AP

A woman receives a coronavirus vaccination at the Kololo airstrip in Kampala, Uganda. Photograph: Nicholas Bamulanzeki/AP

[Jason Burke](#) Africa correspondent

Sun 11 Jul 2021 10.36 EDT

A Ugandan government minister has blamed the west for his country's inability to secure more Covid-19 vaccines, as the World Health Organization warned [Africa](#) urgently needed hundreds millions more jabs to fend off a surging third wave of infections.

Chris Baryomunsi said [Uganda](#) had been able to vaccinate more than a million people but was unable to obtain further shots.

“The problem has been the supply side,” said Baryomunsi, who is also an epidemiologist. “We have the money but we simply can’t get the vaccine. This is a challenge of access and equity. We have to rely on the western world and the western world has focused on its population. The impression is that people there don’t care about Africans.”

Uganda, which successfully repressed earlier waves of infection, has like other countries across Africa risked significant economic damage by imposing another severe lockdown.

“There was complacency that set in with the population and then a new variant that was much more aggressive,” Baryomunsi told the Guardian. “We have lost many people. The good news is that we have started to bring down infections.”

Dr Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO’s director for Africa, told reporters the continent had just marked its most dire pandemic week ever. “But the worst is yet to come as the fast-moving third wave continues to gain speed and new ground,” she said.

In the seven days to Thursday, the continent recorded 251,000 cases, a 21% increase. So far only 1.6% of vaccine doses administered globally have been given in Africa, and less than 2% of its population vaccinated.

“This leaves hundreds of millions of people still vulnerable to infection and serious illness,” Moeti said. “The end to this precipitous rise is still weeks away. We can still break the chain of transmission by testing, isolating contacts and cases and following key public health measures.”

Sixteen African countries are experiencing a resurgence of the virus, with the more contagious Delta variant detected in 10 of them. In all, [151,000 people have died](#) across the continent. With limited testing and mortality statistics, both totals are thought to be very significant underestimates.

cases

South Africa is the worst-hit country in Africa, with new daily infections hitting record highs, fuelled by the Delta variant and late responses from policymakers. Excess mortality figures in South Africa suggest [more than 170,000 have died of the disease](#), though official statistics record 65,000.

Though infections in the country's economic heartland of Gauteng province appeared to have reached a peak, the rest of South Africa is being hit hard, leading to further criticism of local authorities and the ruling African National Congress. Cyril Ramaphosa, the president, is likely to announce the extension of restrictions imposed two weeks ago when he addresses the nation on Sunday evening.

In Sudan, almost 200 doctors and other frontline health workers have died of Covid, and most are still waiting for vaccines, local medical staff said.

There is some hope for faster vaccine deliveries to Africa. The WHO said [the Covax scheme](#), the UN-backed programme set up to ensure fair distribution of vaccines, was hoping to deliver more than 20m doses that are expected to arrive imminently from the US.

“Covax partners are working around the clock to clinch dose-sharing pledges and procurement deals with manufacturers to ensure that the most vulnerable Africans get a Covid-19 vaccination quickly.

“These efforts are paying off. Our appeals for ‘we first and not me first’ are finally turning talk into action. But the deliveries can’t come soon enough because the third wave looms large across the continent,” Moeti said.

Nineteen countries in Africa have used more than 80% of their Covax-supplied doses, while 31 countries have used more than half.

With even relatively wealthy countries such as South Africa failing to prepare for predictable surges of the virus, there are concerns that other governments across the continent are yet to sufficiently reinforce faltering health systems weakened by decades of underfunding, inefficiency and corruption.

In Tanzania, the government has moved to address problems caused by the policy of the late president [John Magufuli](#), who denied the threat of Covid and failed to impose meaningful measures to restrict the spread of the disease. Since his death in March, authorities in the east African country have moved to [publicly acknowledge the threat of the virus](#).

One doctor working in a large private hospital in the major city of Arusha said the situation there remained very serious.

“People are dying every day. There’s not enough oxygen. We have to turn them away and they die at home. I think it will get worse before it gets better and that makes me despair,” the doctor, who requested anonymity because he was not authorised to talk to the media, said.

Boniface Kenn, a travel agent in Dar es Salaam, said the situation had deteriorated in recent weeks and was now “really, really bad”.

Tanzania is one of the countries on the continent that has suffered most acutely from travel restrictions, which have ruined tourism industries everywhere on the continent.

“It has been very tough. I’ve had trouble paying my rent, I’ve taken my kids out of school, sometimes I’ve not been able to feed my family. It will take a lot to recover from this,” Kenn said.

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‘No peace without justice’: families of Italy’s mafia victims wait for closure

Italy’s sluggish legal process under the spotlight as devastated relatives fight for cases to go to trial



Vincenzo Agostino, father of the policeman Antonino Agostino, who was murdered with his pregnant wife, Ida, near Palermo in 1989. Photograph: Alessio Mamo/The Guardian

Vincenzo Agostino, father of the policeman Antonino Agostino, who was murdered with his pregnant wife, Ida, near Palermo in 1989. Photograph: Alessio Mamo/The Guardian

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[Lorenzo Tondo in Palermo](#)

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Mon 12 Jul 2021 00.00 EDT

Clinging to his son's coffin, Vincenzo Agostino solemnly swore that he would not cut his hair or beard until justice was served. It was 10 August 1989, five days after two mafia hitmen on a motorbike had killed Antonino Agostino, a police officer, and his wife, Ida, who was five months pregnant.

The couple were shot dead in broad daylight on the seafront promenade in Villagrazia di Carini, a town about 20 miles from Palermo. Vincenzo witnessed his son's agony as the killers fired a full magazine of bullets at him. He saw his daughter-in-law, who was shot in the heart, move closer to her husband in a vain attempt to console him.

Last month a judge released a report revealing how Antonino Agostino was murdered because he was investigating fugitive mobsters. [One of the killers, the mafia boss Nino Madonia, was sentenced to life in prison](#) in March. It was a small step forward, despite many unanswered questions and the fact that many of those involved in the murder are still at large.



Martino Ceravolo by the grave of his son, Filippo Ceravolo, who was killed in 2012. 'I'll continue to knock on my son's grave to let him know I haven't given up,' he says. Photograph: Alessio Mamo/The Guardian

The sentence has reignited debate in [Italy](#) over the sluggish legal process and agonising struggle for judicial closure for family members of innocent victims of the mafia.

Thirty-two years later, Vincenzo has kept his promise: his long beard now reaches his chest and has become a symbol of resistance against mafia bosses and for the long quest for the truth facing hundreds of relatives of victims of organised crime in Italy.

[According to a report from the anti-mafia association Libera](#), almost 80% of about 600 cases of innocent victims of organised crime in Italy have been only partially solved or are completely unsolved. Most investigations have been closed for lack of evidence, while many others are trapped in endless trials and dozens are awaiting judicial action.

The distress and frustration that the victims' relatives carry with them cause a range of psychological problems, such as depression, panic attacks, suicidal thoughts and post-traumatic stress. The Guardian travelled to four regions in southern Italy with a history of organised crime, interviewing

parents and children of mafia victims who, decades after the murder of their loved one, are demanding that the cases be reopened.

We have been abandoned without support. I've thought of setting myself on fire outside the justice ministry

Martino Ceravolo

For more than 30 years, Vincenzo Agostino has pursued prosecutors relentlessly to convince them to reopen the investigation into his son's death, which has been closed dozens of times. During an earlier investigation, it was revealed that during the violent war the mafia waged against the Italian state in those years, Antonino was working as a secret agent charged with locating fugitive mafiosi. His death uncovered the alleged relationship between members of the Italian secret service and mafia bosses, which continues to be a focus of investigations today.

"Today, one thing is clear: some notable member of the state betrayed my son Antonino and informed the mafia of his role as a secret agent," says Vincenzo. "Who are the faithless and deceitful institutional representatives who betrayed this country and served a death sentence to members of the police and magistrature? No, it is still not time to cut my beard."

In a police lineup in 2016, Vincenzo picked out a colleague of his son who was implicated in the murder. For this reason, at 86, he is forced to live under police protection 24 hours a day.

"Watching your son, daughter-in-law and unborn grandson die destroys your life. I carry in my heart a wound the size of a crater," Vincenzo says. He and his wife, Augusta, led the battle to uncover their son's killers. Augusta died in 2019. On her gravestone, next to her son in the Santa Maria di Gesù cemetery in Palermo, is inscribed: "Here lies Augusta, mother of Antonino, who still awaits truth and justice."



Vincenzo Agostino vowed not to cut his beard until he had achieved justice. ‘It is still not time,’ he says. Photograph: Alessio Mamo/The Guardian

In another cemetery, about 200 miles away in the territory of the [Calabrian 'Ndrangheta](#), another father knocks on his son’s gravestone. He asks if he can hear him and wants to know what it’s like up there in heaven. The father’s name is Martino Ceravolo, and he says has not known peace since the 'Ndrangheta [killed his son Filippo, 19, by mistake on 25 October 2012](#) near Soriano Calabro.

“That evening, Filippo had planned to visit his girlfriend, who lived in a small town four kilometres from here,” says Martino, 52, who ran a confectionery stand with his son. “His car wasn’t working, so he tried to hitch a lift. A young man from Soriano Calabro offered to take him there. Unfortunately, he ended up in the wrong car on the wrong night.”

At that time, a violent war was raging within the 'Ndrangheta between the powerful Emanuele clan and the Loiero clan. Filippo could not have known that [Domenico Tassone, who had offered him a lift, was on the rival clan’s hitlist](#). At about 10pm, four men surrounded Tassone’s car and started shooting. Bullets meant for Tassone hit Filippo in the head and chest.

“When I arrived at the scene of the crime, my entire world fell apart,” says Martino, who takes tranquillisers every day to cope with his panic attacks. “Tassone left the car screaming, ‘they wanted to kill me!’ He miraculously survived, as Filippo lay on the ground in a pool of blood.”

Filippo’s case was closed for lack of evidence, despite prosecutors having identified the four men responsible for the attack, who continue to control the local area. “Those criminals took my son’s life – and ours, too,” says Martino.



Angelina Landa with a photo of her father, Michele Landa, who was murdered by the Camorra in 2006. Photograph: Alessio Mamo/The Guardian

One of Martino’s daughters suffers from depression, and his wife tried to kill herself three years ago after her son’s case was closed yet again.

“We’ve been abandoned without any psychological support,” says Martino. “I, too, have thought of taking my life. I’ve thought of setting myself on fire in front of the ministry of justice.”

The psychological impact on families can be devastating, especially in the case of “ambiguous loss”, in which the bodies of victims are never

recovered. Close family members living in a constant limbo can develop serious depression or alcoholism.

“After the death of my father, I suffered from anxiety and panic attacks for years, while my mother dealt with depression for the rest of her life,” says Daniela Marcone, 52, vice-president of Libera.



Daniela Marcone, with a photo of her father, Francesco Marcone, who was murdered by the mafia in 1995 in Foggia. Today she is a leader of the anti-mafia organisation Libera. Photograph: Alessio Mamo/The Guardian

Daniela’s father, [Francesco, was gunned down on the evening of 31 March 1995](#) in the stairwell of his apartment building, by a killer from the local mafia in Foggia, Puglia. He was the director of the public tax agency, who had denounced corruption in his office and tax evasion by several firms.

Despite the fact that Marcone’s murder was a textbook mafia killing, his case remains unsolved. “I know of mothers who have reached out to mafia bosses, pleading with them to reveal the location of the body, just to be able to give their child an honourable burial.”

The wait for justice can become so frustrating that many victims’ relatives have become pseudo-detectives. When Angelina Landa understood that the police were not investigating the death of her father, [Michele, a 62-year-old](#)

security guard allegedly killed by the Neapolitan Camorra, she decided to take matters into her own hands.

In 2006, the Casalesi clan of the Camorra mafia, which inspired the TV series Gomorrah, had turned to the lucrative business of stealing industrial telephone batteries. Michele had been assigned to guard a Vodafone relay station near Mondragone, in Campania, which was controlled by the Camorra. His charred body was found on 5 September 2006 inside his little Fiat.

“My brothers and I agreed that we had to act soon,” says Angelina, 48, a primary school teacher. “Five days after his disappearance, we jumped over the fence where the police had moved his burnt car. Among the ashes we found his bones. After five days, they still hadn’t removed his remains from the car.”

A murder ordered by bosses never has just one perpetrator but a chain of those responsible

Federico Cafiero de Raho

Investigators closed the case after a few months, citing lack of evidence.

Another compounding factor in the resolution of cases is *omertà*, the mafia’s code of silence. “Mafiosi rarely testify against their own, including their rivals,” says Marcone.

“In a mafia killing, it’s difficult to find witnesses among ordinary people, especially in small towns where organised crime groups are deeply embedded and *omertà* is a social phenomenon,” she says. “People are reluctant to come forward because they fear the bosses’ reprisals.”

“The code of silence is the basis of the mafia’s strength,” says Federico Cafiero De Raho, national anti-mafia prosecutor. “Investigations into mafia killings can be really complicated. A murder ordered by bosses never has just one perpetrator, but a chain of those responsible. This makes the investigation difficult, unless an arrested mobster decides to speak out.”

[Italy's largest mafia trial in three decades begins against 'Ndrangheta](#)

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Paradoxically, sometimes the hope of reopening mafia cases lies in the hands of the same people who committed those murders: [mafiosi who are arrested and decide to collaborate with prosecutors in exchange for reduced sentences](#). In recent years, such cases have shed light on numerous “cold cases”.

“I thumb through the paper every day in the hope of finding news of a recent mafia turncoat,” says Martino Ceravolo. “I realise it’s frustrating, but I’ve never sought a vendetta, only justice. And until I find it, I’ll continue to knock on my son’s grave to let him know I haven’t given up.

“Without justice, there is no peace,” he says. “Not for me, nor for him.”

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[Gina Yashere](#)

Interview

Gina Yashere on riches, racism and US success: ‘I don’t like to boast, but I’m doing very well!’

[Simon Hattenstone](#)



Gina Yashere: ‘I’m proud that I didn’t get taken under by depression and bitterness.’ Photograph: Bethany Mollenkof/The Guardian

Gina Yashere: ‘I’m proud that I didn’t get taken under by depression and bitterness.’ Photograph: Bethany Mollenkof/The Guardian

The standup’s new memoir traces her London childhood and battle for recognition in the UK. She discusses coming out, moving to the US and making it big



Mon 12 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

It is 14 years since [Gina Yashere](#) walked out on Britain. The standup comic was sick of accepting second best. It's not that she wasn't successful – she was. She had a recurring slot on the BBC's Lenny Henry Show between 2004 and 2005, sold out theatres when she toured and was a regular guest on the TV panel show Mock the Week. But it wasn't enough. She felt that any number of less-talented standups had their own TV shows, while she was always on a promise that never materialised. And it was beginning to destroy her. So she packed her bags and headed to the US, where she was an unknown.

"I always knew I had something special, and I wanted to swim with the big boys. I'm not going to stay in England begging for crumbs," she says. "To get off my arse and start again, knowing it may take me years to get recognition, if any – you've got to have a pretty astounding amount of self-belief to do that." And, to be fair, she did have. "I wasn't doing it in the way Ricky Gervais and Russell Brand were doing it, where they were coming off hit shows in England, and coming over to America already recognised, with their faces on billboards. Nobody knew who the fuck I was, and I literally started again, doing open mics, performing wherever I could."

Yashere is Zooming from her home in the heights of Altadena, 14 miles from downtown Los Angeles. She is still selling out live shows, stars in the CBS comedy series *Bob Hearts Abishola* (which she devised with Chuck Lorre, nicknamed the king of TV sitcoms), has just written her memoir, *Cack-Handed*, and now at 47 is finally content. Yashere looks younger than she often did in her 30s when she suffered terribly with lupus, developed crippling arthritis in her hands and gained more than 5st in weight (which she lost when she came off the medication). She still talks 13 to the dozen, barking out individual words for emphasis, and cackling like a machine gun. Yashere is magnificently self-assured, unapologetically confrontational, gloriously potty-mouthed and very funny.

She is wearing floral leggings and a T-shirt with “Good Trouble Maker” printed on it. That could have been the title of your memoir, I say. As it happens, it refers to a book by her friend Luvvie Ajayi Jones, but she agrees. “Luvvie made me an honorary good trouble maker because I’ve broken down doors, I never let anybody stop me doing what I wanted to do, and I talk a lot of truth publicly regardless of whether I think it will be good or bad for my career. I’ve always been very honest. A lot of celebrities aren’t.”



Yashere with (from left) Folake Olowofoyeku and Vernee Watson in *Bob Hearts Abishola*. Photograph: CBS Photo Archive/CBS/Getty Images

Even as a little girl growing up in Bethnal Green, east London, she spoke her mind. Yashere and her two brothers were born to parents who had emigrated from Benin City, Nigeria. Back home, her mother was a headteacher, while her father was an academic, studying for a PhD in London. But their intellect and social status counted for little in England. Her mother could only get menial jobs till she took matters into her own hands and became a businesswoman. As for her father, he returned to Nigeria when Yashere was three, had another family, and only got back in touch when she performed in Nigeria as a successful comic.

In *Cack-Handed* she documents the many tribulations of her childhood. She was called Dapo, a shortened version of her middle name Obedapo. At primary school, children referred to her as Bus Dapo. So she became a scrapper. While still at primary school, a white man saw her leaning against his parked car and bellowed: “Get the fuck off my car, you black bastard!” “Piss off, you white bastard!” she shouted back. She ran off towards school, he gave chase, caught her and punched and kicked her repeatedly in front of a teacher. Her assailant was arrested and let off with a caution. Yashere’s mother launched a private prosecution against him for assault. In court, it emerged that he was a firefighter, and the judge gave him an absolute discharge. “This was my first taste of the difference between justice for black people and justice for white people in England,” Yashere writes in *Cack-Handed*.

At secondary school she attempted to reinvent herself for the first time. By now she used her first name, Regina, and on the whole resorted to humour rather than fighting to make her point. But she was ridiculed even more for Regina than she had been for Dapo. As she was walking away from school after finishing her English O-level, a girl in the year below leaned out of her classroom window, used a racist slur and called her “Regina Vagina”. Yashere lost it. She ran up to the classroom, pushed the girl against a wall and beat her up, dislocating her shoulder in the process. The school expelled her. Yashere, a serious-minded 16-year-old who believed she had screwed up her future, took an overdose. She was taken to hospital, and had her stomach pumped.

When she passed nine O-levels, her school invited her back. But Yashere wasn’t interested and went elsewhere for A-levels. This was the perfect

opportunity to reinvent herself for a second time. Square Regina became cool Gina, got herself a new wardrobe and cast off her past. “And I’ve been cool ever since,” she states categorically.

After A-levels, Yashere became [the only female engineer installing lifts at Canary Wharf](#) on the Isle of Dogs, east London, as it was transformed into a high-rise business mecca. Her male colleagues were spoilt for choice – they didn’t know whether to abuse her for her sex or her race, so they opted for both. “Whenever I do interviews, they always go [posh voice]: ‘Is it difficult being a female comedian in a male environment?’ and I go: ‘I worked on building sites with guys who used to hang pictures of monkeys above my overalls and stick bananas in my pockets, so no, compared to that, this is a walk in the park. It built up my layers of resilience going through all those things.’”



On stage in Birmingham in 2003. Photograph: i4images_music/Alamy

She remembers fantasising about pushing one abuser down a lift shaft. Instead, she took the safer option of quitting. Yashere had no experience of comedy, wasn’t even much of a fan, but at 24 she decided that it was what she was made for. Within months, she was runner-up in the 1996 Hackney Empire New Act of the Year competition and was appearing on TV. Yashere’s material, forged from her everyday experience, took no prisoners.

She explored cultural differences and was equally likely to satirise whites, Nigerians and African-Caribbeans. When working with Lenny Henry, she created memorable characters, notably stroppy motormouth Tanya (known for her catchphrase “I don’t think so!”) and Mrs Omokorede, the pushy mum based on her own mother. She gigged with Michael McIntyre: he opened, she headlined. Yashere appeared to have the world ahead of her, then hit glass ceiling after glass ceiling.

She runs through them. There’s the time the channel BBC Choice invited performers to host a chatshow, telling them the best would be awarded a weekly show. Yashere claims she had better viewing figures than anybody, but the show went to Ralf Little. “That was one of my first disappointments – I was like, oh these industry people are fucking liars.” Then there was the panel show The A Factor. “It was me and Curtis Walker and guest comedians talking about topical stuff in the news and doing standup and sketches in between. When I look back at that show, it was a predecessor of Mock the Week. But we were relegated to fuck off o’clock and never given any support. Then they make a white version of it years later which gets a primetime slot and all the white comics who appear on it regularly go on to sell out stadiums and become huge stars.”

Then there’s Mock The Week itself. “When I was doing the show the producers would say: ‘Can you slip in a bit of your mum’s Nigerian accent when you do some of your jokes ’cos it’s really funny.’” So she did it to please them. “Then I got lambasted. People said: ‘All she talks about is being African and black.’” She sees it in a different light now. “They were using me to hide the fact that they didn’t have enough women or black people on the show. And I was like: I don’t want to be anyone’s token any more, I want my own shit.”

Did she become bitter? “Yes,” she says. And she started to hate herself for it. The final straw, she says, was when Jocelyn Jee Esien, who had made her name with pranks and hidden camera skits in BBC Three’s 3 Non-Blondes, was given her own sketch show. “I’d been vying for my own sketch show for four years, and they kept saying: ‘Oh yes, if you just do this for us ...’ I wanted to be happy for her, but because we all fight for the few crumbs thrown off the table of the successful white comics, I found myself being jealous and thinking: ‘I should have got that job; that was my show.’”

It's a painful admission, but as usual Yashere confronts it head-on. "I thought this is not how I should be feeling; I should not be coveting another black comic's success. We should all be able to be successful together, just like white comics were allowed to be. Then the BBC had the gall to come and ask me to help write on her show." She laughs. "I was like: OK, these guys are taking me for a fool, I'm out of here. I've got to get out of this country before I end up killing myself; by eating myself from the inside out and dying of a stroke or heart attack through bitterness and anger."



On stage at the Tribeca film festival in 2018. Photograph: Roy Rochlin/Getty Images for Tribeca Film Festival

Yashere has never been rose-tinted about the US. She knows just how savage its racism can be, but she prefers it to the "insidious pathetic limp handshake of British establishment racism". As in Britain, she says, there is a glass ceiling. "But the difference is it's much higher so at least you're a multimillionaire when you hit it and you can cry into your money." And is she a multimillionaire? "Yes!" she laughs. "I don't like to boast, but yes I'm doing very well. Look, as a dark-skinned, gay immigrant, not-Halle-Berry-looking black woman, there is a glass ceiling as far as performance and getting on TV goes. I'm older, I'm not going to get the opportunities a younger, prettier person is going to get. So I've moved into different directions."

When she was first approached about Bob Hearts Abishola, she assumed she would be exploited again. She told her agent to turn it down. “My younger brother Edwin and best friend, Lila, called me up and screamed at me for two hours, going: ‘Do you not realise this is the opportunity you’ve been waiting for? Get a life, Gina. You’ve been moaning about lack of opportunities and here’s one in your lap.’ And I was like: ‘You’re right, I’ll give it a go.’” She went from consultant, to exec-producer, writer and actor on the show, creating a part for herself because she had the power to do so. After a lifetime working solo, she has become part of the writing team. “It’s a day job. It’s an extremely well-paid day job, but it’s a day job, which I’ve not had since I left my job as an engineer.”

A dog barks in the background. Kemi, named after Yashere’s character in Bob Hearts Abishola, is a mini Australian shepherd. I ask if I can meet her. The door opens and Yashere’s partner carries Kemi in. Nina, a professor of social justice, introduces herself. “I know,” she grins. “Social justice is a novel concept in the US. Nice to meet you.” She heads off, telling me that Kemi is their love child.

Gina and Nina, I say – you’re made for each other. “Yes indeed!” Yashere says happily. They have been together seven years. Has Nina changed her? “Definitely. She’s made me take a look at myself, made me relax more, made me have fun more.” Nina is white, and Yashere sounds proud when she tells me that she is named after Nina Simone. “Her parents were freedom fighters. They rode those buses into Mississippi and got chased by the Ku Klux Klan. She comes from *good stock*. If I was going to go with a white woman, I’ve picked the perfect one.”

I ask Yashere why she came out as gay after moving to the US. “I had come out to friends and family, but I’d never come out publicly in England because I didn’t want to give them something else to box me in with.” There was also an element of fear. “It was rooted in shame – my mother’s shame. She is a Nigerian Christian. Many Nigerians and Christians are super homophobic. It was more about the fear of my mum being embarrassed and that shame fed into me.” Now, she says, her mother adores Nina, and has even stopped referring to Yashere as her “gay clown”.



‘I’ve found my home and can’t see myself living in England again.’
Photograph: Bethany Mollenkof/The Guardian

It was only after coming out that she realised how much not doing so had stymied her work. “The day I came out on stage, my life became like an open book. I have no fear of being outed. This is who I am, take me or leave me, I don’t give a shit. And my comedy got way better after that.”

We talk about how comedy has changed in recent years. Does she think it has become too fearful of causing offence? “Yes and no. When it comes to race and misogyny, no. White male comics are like: ‘We can’t say anything.’ Ah, shut the fuck up! You’re getting upset because you can’t be racist any more, you can’t touch women willy-nilly without consent any more, you can’t wear blackface any more. *Shut the fuck up.*” And the yes? “There is a world on Twitter where people are just waiting to be offended. I ignore these people.” She has a simple rule of thumb by which she judges whether her humour is offensive. “If I’m talking about a group of people, and I feel uncomfortable doing that material in a room full of those people, then you know your shit is racist.”

After Yashere first visited Nigeria, she went into a slump, concluding that she was “a citizen of nowhere, accepted by no one”. Now she says she feels a sense of belonging in the US. “I’ve found my home and can’t see myself

living in England again. But I'm still black, I'm still a woman, I'm an immigrant, I'm gay – so I still have those things to contend with.”

I ask what she is most proud of. “I’m proud that I didn’t get taken under by depression and bitterness, that I kept going. I went: ‘You’re doing something you love for a living, which 90% of the world doesn’t get to do, so enjoy it and stop comparing yourself to others.’ The day I stopped doing that, I swear the universe opened up and abundance started coming to me.” She says it with an almost-religious fervour. “So yeah, I’m proud of that.”

Cack-Handed by Gina Yashere is published by HarperCollins Publishers. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy for £14.78 (RRP £16.99) at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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Jazz

‘There is no fear’: how a cold-war tour inspired Pakistan’s progressive jazz scene

A US state department initiative was the unlikely catalyst for a creative explosion of Pakistani rhythm and western improv



‘I was quite confused at first’ ... Badal Roy. Photograph: Andrew Lepley/Redferns

‘I was quite confused at first’ ... Badal Roy. Photograph: Andrew Lepley/Redferns

Haseeb Iqbal

Mon 12 Jul 2021 04.49 EDT

In 1956, a new weapon was unveiled in the cold war: jazz. That year, the US introduced [the Jazz Ambassadors Tour](#), a showcase that sent American musicians overseas to parts of the world that were perceived to be under threat of Soviet influence.

While they initially intended to send ballet dancers and symphony orchestras, the State Department were persuaded that the jazz performers who were spearheading the civil rights movement would help generate a positive image of the US to newly independent nations (between 1945 and 1960, 40 countries gained their independence, representing a quarter of the world's population). The department saw it as a way of silencing Soviet criticism that racial inequality was a stark issue in the US. The ethics were questionable, but the musicians saw this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to share their music directly with people in countries from Asia to Africa and beyond.

One of the countries the US focused on was [Pakistan](#), which had gained its independence from British colonial rule less than a decade earlier, in 1947: Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie and Dave Brubeck were among the performers at state-funded gigs during the 1950s and 60s. These concerts wove jazz into Pakistan's musical fabric and through its traditional instruments, resulting in sounds that remain relatively unheralded yet are still flourishing today.

In attendance at Duke Ellington's 1963 performance in Karachi was a teenager, Badal Roy. He had grown up in the city and was informally learning the tabla, a twinned set of drums. "At that time of my life I was mainly into Pakistani classical music and rock'n'roll – I loved Elvis Presley," he tells me over the phone from his apartment in Wilmington, Delaware. "But that concert was my first introduction into jazz music. I had no idea what to expect and it was incredible."



Badal Roy, right, with Ornette Coleman. Photograph: Courtesy Badal Roy

In 1968, he moved to New York in the hope of studying statistics at university. He struggled financially and worked as a busboy at A Taste of India, a restaurant in Greenwich Village, where he also began performing tabla each week.

Other musicians would sometimes come and jam. One guitarist, John McLaughlin, returned weekly, and asked Roy if he would join him on his album *My Goal's Beyond*: Roy's tabla became a key part of its sound. A few weeks later, McLaughlin returned to the restaurant and told Roy to pack up his tabla and come to the Village Gate club down the road as his friend wanted to hear him play. Upon arriving, Roy learned that this friend was [Miles Davis](#), someone he knew nothing about. He was instructed to play. At the end of the 15-minute freestyle, Davis turned towards him and said: "You're good."

A couple of months after their encounter, Roy was asked to come into the studio and record, and found himself in a room with Davis, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Jack DeJohnette and more. Thankfully for his stress levels, he had very little knowledge of any of them. Davis told Roy: "You start."

He began with the groove he played most often – TaKaNaTaKaNaTin – and shortly after, Herbie Hancock joined in, followed by the rest. The sessions ended up becoming Davis’s 1972 album On the Corner, and the simultaneous melody and rhythmic depth of Roy’s tabla helped to hold together its wild mix of funk and free jazz. “I was quite confused at first but when they started to play with me and we found the rhythm, I felt better,” Roy says. “I found it difficult to explain this instrument to them: how the tabla is tuned, how the language of the instrument is different, the rhythm pattern, everything. They are very clever, though, and they picked it up very quickly.”

Roy never received any formal training on the instrument, and this accounts for him having a much freer style than most tabla players. He would often play a set of eight tabla, all tuned to different pitches, offering him both melody and rhythm with a broad sonic scope, and his lack of association to any academic discipline meant he wasn’t bound by the “tala” rhythmic system that most south Asian players used. His liberation enabled a player like Miles to connect with his artistry, paving the way for Roy to join forces with [Ornette Coleman](#), Lonnie Liston Smith, Pharoah Sanders and more in the years that followed. The impact of the tabla and the Pakistani approach made a small but significant impression on the American jazz landscape; Roy was also the only musician to play in both Davis and Coleman’s bands.

While Roy was busy working on pioneering albums such as Smith’s Astral Travelling and Sanders’ Wisdom Through Music, Pakistan was experiencing its own golden cultural age: its booming cinema industry was the fourth largest producer of feature films in the world during the early 70s. Almost every experimental, radical-sounding record that came out of mid-century Pakistan – many of them rooted in jazz – was from a film soundtrack. The elaborate acts of choreographed dancing and decadence expressed both organisation and chaos; sentiments that were reflected in the music, yielding a genre-shattering set of sounds.

A producer such as M Ashraf composed 2,800 film tracks in over 400 films across his 45-year career, aiding the careers of Pakistani singers such as Noor Jehan and Nahid Akhtar who would become some of the country’s

most beloved singers. “An independent music space didn’t exist like it does now; radio was sticking to a more patriotic agenda and labels were limited in what they would champion,” explains musician and ethnomusicologist Natasha Noorani. “So, film is what you would rely on to see the deeper side of Pakistan’s culture. You could experiment with film, and that’s where the craziest records would come from” – ones where jazz clashed with pop, psychedelia and more.

The Lahore-based Tafo Brothers brought an entirely fresh dimension to Pakistan’s film music in the 70s, incorporating drum machines, analogue synths and fuzz pedals over the jazz infrastructure, allowing a more electronic, dancefloor-inclined energy to emerge. However, Pakistan’s cultural momentum stagnated in 1977 when military dictator Zia-ul-Haq seized power, and saw cinema, provoking different ideas and thoughts within the population, as a threat. Censorship laws curtailed creative independence. “If you study south Asian culture, the minute film is doing well, then your music industry is doing well too,” Noorani says. “By the late 70s, film began to be doing terribly and that was the moment the music industry collapsed.”

Session musicians and jazz players fell into unemployment and poverty, and gradually lost respect in a society where the creative arts were not a desirable field to work in. This had a damaging impact on the families who had preserved certain instruments for centuries, through a social system called *gharānā*. Suddenly, the attitudes towards some of the most historically respected figures in Pakistani society had completely shifted, and parents were contemplating whether or not to teach their children the instruments that had been the pillar of their family’s story.

Zohaib Hassan Khan is a member of one of Pakistan’s most esteemed sarangi-playing families from the Amritsar *gharānā*, which had been passing the instrument down each generation since the early 1700s. Khan is now continuing the tradition in the superb Pakistani jazz quartet Jaubi, part of a tiny yet imaginative new generation that also includes artists such as [Red Blood Cat](#) and VIP.



Zohaib Hassan Khan. Photograph: © 2015 Dosti Music Project

The sarangi is a bowed instrument made of wood with generally 35 to 37 strings – it hails from the 16th century and is known for its difficulty to master and richness of sound. “My grandfather’s generation did not teach their children instruments such as the sarangi,” Khan says. “That generation encouraged their children to pursue a more achievable path in order to get a job. My father was the first member of my family in six generations to not play the sarangi and he became a bank officer.”

Likewise, Khan grew up hoping to be a doctor. However, in the early 90s, prime minister Nawaz Sharif privatised the banks. “My father lost his job and ended up working in a small grocery shop. We had to forgo our dreams of higher education, so we were told to go into music in order to try and make money at such a desperate time.”

Khan’s little brother took up the drums, and his twin brother picked the harmonium. Khan opted for the guitar before his uncle intervened, urging his father to ensure he played the sarangi instead, saying: “If he is not playing it, then our family’s tradition comes to an end.” They unearthed and fixed a 100-year-old sarangi from the family’s attic.

Despite the richness of the sarangi's history, Khan noticed a lack of respect towards traditional Pakistani instruments. "When I worked at Radio Pakistan, they'd pay me 300 rupees to do one song, as they would for any of the other acoustic instruments such as the tabla and sitar. But if you are the keyboard player, bass guitar player or drummer, they would pay you more than double."

For Pakistani jazz guitarist, Ali Riaz Baqar – another member of Jaubi – this regressive attitude towards the country's rich musical heritage is a product of colonialism. "The colonisers have left, but they have colonised your mind. That mindset is still very prevalent today," he tells me from his Melbourne home. "When I am in Pakistan, I make sure I speak Urdu and not English. But you have a lot of people who want to speak English and dress western and listen to western music because it seems prestigious."

Noorani analyses why she also believes this is the case: "When the British left in 1947, the white man was essentially replaced by the brown, rich man." This paved the way, she says, for an elite upper-middle-class to detach themselves from the majority of Pakistani society, absorbing western culture and releasing it back into their homeland.

While Khan was conscious of the unfair treatment of his instrument, he became frustrated. "My friends who played the tabla learned it in three years, but in order to truly learn an instrument as complex as the sarangi, it takes 10 to 12 years. Musicians who were playing other instruments would start to make a bit of money. I would be practising so much and I wouldn't have enough money to even get food."



Jaubi. Photograph: Uzma Rao

He began playing the drums. One day a few weeks later, upon returning home, he found his father sitting down, crying. While telling me this story, Khan becomes overwhelmed with emotion. “My father turned to me and asked: ‘Even if you don’t make much money, can’t you do this for me?’ He asked if I could continue what his own father did, and retain the family’s legacy.”

Khan was inspired and decided to give the instrument another go in honour of his parents and everything they had sacrificed for him. He would wake up at 4am and practise for 12 hours a day, while his father would pray towards him in the mornings to offer him strength. In 2010 at a sarangi festival in Lahore, which united almost all of the country’s players, Khan showcased his talents in front of a large crowd including his father. Despite being one of the youngest musicians present, he was lifted and thrown up into the air at the end of the event because of how impressively he played. The memory of the event is of particular significance to Khan, following his father’s death the following January.

He continues to play the sarangi in his honour and a few years later he joined forces with Baqar, as well as tabla player Kashif Ali Dhani and drummer Qammar Abbas, to form Jaubi, which translates to “whatever”

from Urdu. Baqar's lack of formal training alongside the classically trained band members creates a fascinating framework, balancing the emotional, introspective and spiritual sensibilities of the strings alongside a more hard-hitting dance energy from the percussion.

Jaubi put out their first EP, *The Deconstructed Ego*, in 2016, and released their debut album last month, *Nafs at Peace*. They have pushed the boundaries of both western jazz and classical Pakistani music by fusing the two approaches together, and have collaborated with London-based flautist Tenderlonious, AKA Ed Cawthorne.

Hailing from a classical background that is built around rigid rules, I was fascinated by how Khan adapted to the more fluid jazz approach. "Whenever you get used to something in life, you often feel a natural urge to change things," he says. "Learning music through a classical lens is all I had done since I was a child and while I had those boundaries set, I was always ready to cross them and experiment with western musical approaches."

The key difference is that western jazz caters for total flexibility when it comes to the notes that can be played, allowing the improvisation to take any direction. However, Pakistani music is rooted in the raga format, which is a melodic mode that allows only a certain number of notes to be played, creating a rigid template to paint different human emotions known to "colour the mind", as Baqar puts it. The two apparently divergent approaches are united, though, in using oral improvisation, trusting the ear to listen and respond. No sheet music was written down in the creation of Jaubi's music, illuminating how two seemingly disparate musical cultures share common ground. "Through learning the western approach, I learned so much about the notes that I had never known before," Khan says. "Having to learn what C-sharp meant pushed me musically."

"People are very scared," he continues. "Scared of making a mistake or playing outside of the boundaries they're used to because of the strict training. Among the jazz musicians I have watched, there is no fear. They are very broad-minded. Their music reflects their personalities. They thrive off mistakes – they don't feel guilty to make a mistake." The self-taught

Baqar, meanwhile, found a great virtue to working within the template of the raga: “You have to find freedom within the discipline.”

It is this paradoxical freedom within the stringent rules that appealed to Tenderlonious. “You’ve got this scale which comprises six notes and those are the only six notes you can play. You can mess around with the order but you are restricted. Ironically, that restriction gives you more freedom of expression. I approach it thinking: I am going to try and flip this as much as possible within the six notes. It worked in my favour – my improvisational approach thrived and it was really freeing for me. Less is more.”



Dizzy Gillespie charming a snake while on tour in Karachi, Pakistan.
Photograph: Bettmann/Bettmann Archive

It was the same in 1956, when Dizzy Gillespie also appreciated the freedom within the rules. He spent afternoons between performances jamming with locals and street performers, trying to understand their musical approach, resulting in the track *Rio Pakistan* released the following year. It is arguably the first raga to be incorporated into American jazz, unfolding over 11 and a half minutes as Gillespie’s trumpet combines with the violin of Stuff Smith, combusting in a unique track that is noticeably limited in its melodic range.

The fearlessness of Khan, Baqar and Tenderlonious in working with their opposing approaches has resulted in similarly groundbreaking music: merging without ego or hierarchy, aided by the magic of improvisation, appreciating both rules and fluidity. It is the same approach that Gillespie took, and that Davis exemplified so boldly, incorporating Badal Roy's tabla, an instrument known for its strictness, into an experimental free jazz album. Pakistan's jazz players show that at a time when so many are conscious of what separates us, music can find a common ground in that very difference. As Roy puts it: "Our musical languages are different, but with patience, we learned to understand each other. That is when the real magic occurred."

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Television & radio

From Gossip Girl to Frasier to Sex and the City: are reboots driven by nostalgia – or desperation?



Let's go round again ... from left, the original incarnations of Sex and the City, Frasier, Gossip Girl, Beavis and Butt-Head and The Fresh Prince of Bel Air. Illustration: Guardian Design

Let's go round again ... from left, the original incarnations of Sex and the City, Frasier, Gossip Girl, Beavis and Butt-Head and The Fresh Prince of Bel Air. Illustration: Guardian Design

TV is awash with reboots, with even Beavis and Butthead making a comeback. But are fans being shortchanged? Can these old formats really work in a world they were never created to anticipate?



[Sam Wolfson](#)

Mon 12 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Earlier this year, it was announced that Kelsey Grammer would be returning to TV in a new version of the hit 90s comedy Frasier. Grammer, who has struggled to find a follow-up hit since the series ended in 2004, may have been [thrilled about his return](#). However, his official statement hinted at industry manoeuvres as well as career satisfaction – before sharing how much he “gleefully” anticipated the new series, he made sure to namecheck Paramount twice and congratulate the studio on “its entry into the streaming world”.

[Gossip Girl review – a clumsy but watchable homage to the beloved teen hit](#)
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It was just the latest announcement to bring a sense of déjà vu to TV, as it follows cinema in resurrecting old hit after old hit, the big stars of the 90s and 00s mere pawns in a larger war between streamers and traditional TV. Last week, the BBC announced it had secured the UK premiere of the much-anticipated [Gossip Girl](#) reboot. Schedules have heaved in recent years with the returns and reimaginings of old shows, from [Will & Grace](#) and [Arrested Development](#) in the US to [Cold Feet](#) and [Spitting Image](#) in the UK, with

further huge hits including Dexter and a Samantha-free [Sex and the City](#) all in the pipeline.

“It’s getting to the point where there are different genres of reboot,” says Peter White, TV editor at entertainment industry publication Deadline. “You’ve got shows like Sex and the City where you’re getting most of the original cast back for a continuation of the show. Then you’ve got ones where they’re basically just taking the brand name – so Gossip Girl is coming back with a new cast. Some of these can actually be quite creative. Everybody Hates Chris is coming back as a cartoon. The Wonder Years is being rebooted, still focused on the 1960s as the original show – which was made in the 1980s – was, but with a black family instead of a white one, which is more interesting than just bringing it up to date.”

Some are quite creative: The Wonder Years is being rebooted with a black family. But is anyone talking about the new Saved By the Bell?

There are, seemingly, three big reasons for the trend. The first is Roseanne Barr. When her comedy Roseanne returned to ABC in 2018, it was the year’s most watched show in America, [averaging 20 million viewers](#) – unprecedented numbers for a network sitcom in the modern era. Ultimately, the series burned out in [a flame of controversy](#), and Barr was banished from ABC because of a racist tweet. But networks had seen the power of nostalgic revivals. The show was subsequently re-rebooted as The Conners, which killed off the Roseanne character in the first episode and followed the rest of the family as they dealt with her death. It is currently ABC’s biggest sitcom.

A second reason is the rise of the streaming wars and SVODs (subscription video on demand services). Netflix realised early on that it could lure nostalgic subscribers by rebooting shows from other networks. They’re [rumoured to have paid](#) Alexis Bledel and Lauren Graham \$750,000 per episode to return for a four-part coda to the mother/daughter sitcom Gilmore Girls, famed for its unbelievably fast dialogue and coffee-addicted child characters. Similarly eye-watering price tags have been attached to Netflix revivals of Full House and Arrested Development.

The third reason is a TV industry seemingly averse to risk – perhaps even more so during the pandemic. But, despite the seemingly low potential for a flop, the history of TV reboots is not littered with success stories. Shows such as 2015's [Heroes Reborn](#) (a reboot of the superhero series Heroes) and 2017's Prison Break revival debuted to low viewing figures and disappointed reviews. And is anyone talking about the rehashed Saved By the Bell, or failed YouTube competitor Quibi's bitesized versions of Reno 911 and Punk'd!?



Unprecedented ... Roseanne Barr and John Goodman in the short-lived but extremely successful 2018 reboot of Roseanne. Photograph: Adam Rose/AP

An article in the journal [Art in America](#) pointed out that the Quibi reboots were “all somewhat naughty in their original incarnations” but had been “neutered beyond recognition”. It deemed this the product of a culture “so obsessed with proving its morality that it searches for the faintest sign of spontaneity, then buffs it until it’s gone”. So if reboots are supposed to be a safe bet, why are they rarely among the most watched or critically celebrated TV?

“It’s a financial thing,” says White. “A middling reboot can be better for the bottom line than a breakout new thing. Streaming services want something shiny that people recognise that differentiates them from their competitors.

Traditional networks can go to advertisers with something that's both new and recognisable. Everyone at the networks says they want to find the next Fleabag, an original script that comes out of left field – but then two minutes later they're asking [Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Donald Glover to reboot Mr and Mrs Smith](#)." (The 2005 film, which is being reworked into a television series by Amazon, starred Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt as a pair of married killers-for-hire assigned to assassinate each other.)

White says that, ultimately, linking a show to an existing TV brand is often the only way to get it made. "If someone came up with a great new idea for a teen high school show, it might be just as good if not better than Saved By the Bell, but that nostalgia factor is a quick and easy way in."



The future Mr and Mrs Smith ... Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Donald Glover.
Photograph: Frazer Harrison/Bafta LA/Getty Images

Nostalgia also fuelled another, even less imaginative category that emerged during lockdown, when new content was in short supply. Parks and Recreation, The West Wing and the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air all staged "reunion" episodes that were actually just lacklustre rereads of the scripts of old episodes, hammy Zoom calls or tepid cast interviews. Meanwhile, the much-hyped [Friends reunion](#) was little more than an extended trip down memory lane, with improbable contributions from the likes of Justin Bieber.

Yet even this seems to be a big draw for streamers – HBO Max touted it for over a year.

Adesola Thomas is a TV critic and screenwriter who has worked at Netflix and the TV development department of [indie distributor A24](#). Earlier this year, she wrote an essay for Paste magazine about whether a Sex and the City reboot could successfully transcend its white feminism. “I don’t think reboots have to be inherently regressive,” she says over Zoom. “But the regressiveness is kind of a consequence of trying to revive something from a bygone era.

“I hope the Sex and the City reboot is great. I just wonder what it means to be focusing energy on that when, in this moment, we’re trying to focus less on making television about wealthy white people and the hijinks they get up to. Reboots provide comfort and cosiness for viewers in an uncertain world. But escaping to a place of familiarity can mean updating old stories for a world they were not created to anticipate.”

‘Dark and dramatic’ ... Fresh Prince spinoff Bel-Air has been commissioned for two seasons.

She mentions storylines that would never air on HBO today, “like the episode where Samantha wants to have sex with a black guy because she thinks he has a big penis. And I think my generation would look at a character like Big and say, ‘Oh sure, he’s avoidant, that’s his attachment style.’ I don’t think there would be the same kind of intrigue about the messiness of their relationship. But that was an authentic character in the spirit of the show at the time. How are they going to translate that identity to 2021?”

Thomas says her generation of young screenwriters is aware that a lot of the available writing jobs are now on reboots, and most will be happy for the work. “High Maintenance, for example, a show I love from the bottom of my heart. They didn’t bring it back for a fifth season, but were they to ask me to be in the writers room I would absolutely go! Because there’s still a lot of stories to tell there. That’s my thing with reboots, I don’t think they’re all bad but we should be critical of why they’re happening. Who are they servicing?”

That doesn't seem to be a question programme-makers are too worried about, given that the golden age of TV reboots shows no signs of stopping. As well as the likes of Sex and the City and Gossip Girl, the next year will see planned reboots or spin-offs of Battlestar Galactica, Criminal Minds, True Blood, Beavis and Butt-head, Game of Thrones, a "dark and dramatic take on The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air", and many more. Who *are* they servicing? The answer isn't clear, but one thing's for sure: if the film industry is anything to go by, TV may soon be rebooting the reboots.

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[OpinionEuro 2020](#)

England may have lost, but Southgate's team shows us the nation we can be

[Hugh Muir](#)



The practical and moral argument that our diversity is our strength has long been made. This team proves it



England players react during the penalty shootout at the Euro 2020 final between England and Italy at Wembley stadium in London, Sunday, July 11, 2021. Photograph: Carl Recine/AP

England players react during the penalty shootout at the Euro 2020 final between England and Italy at Wembley stadium in London, Sunday, July 11, 2021. Photograph: Carl Recine/AP

Mon 12 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

And so we lost. After the shock and the grief, then, I guess, there is reflection and reckoning. There's sadness for Gareth Southgate and his squad, who have shown themselves to be brilliant sportsmen with the mental and technical excellence to succeed on the field of play at a rarefied level. But we should all be a bit sad today, even those with little or no interest in football. This was about so much more than football.

If we had won, we would have brought home a trophy, had a rollicking great time and even, and this is ludicrous, [a day off](#) gifted to us by government. But what seemed more important to me was that this would have been an opportunity for catharsis.

Culturally and politically, we have been trying to progress with eyes stuck on a rear-view mirror reflecting scenes from a World Cup win in 1966. Having very publicly shown the world that we can come out on top again, we could have overcome this vitality-sapping desire to replicate how we were when we were great, so we could be on the way to being great again.

We need something to prompt reevaluation: young Englishmen becoming champions of Europe, throwing off our hoodoo and pointing, with freshness and enthusiasm to a new direction, could have been that marvellous catalyst.

Of course, we have had this chance before. Alas we didn't really take it. Think back to the 2012 Olympics, when we had the world's biggest stage and showed the cultural and organisational excellence and flair of which we are capable.

Forget for a moment the idiot prime minister. These days he seeks to align himself with our footballers by parading a bespoke England shirt, hoping we'll forget how he [briefly aligned himself](#) with those who said these touchy feely take-the-knee players were insufferably woke. Back in 2012, as London mayor, he was just as clownish, waffling on about table tennis and whiff-whaff.

Think instead about how we projected ourselves through Danny Boyle's extraordinary, daring opening show, fusing a pride in our history with a warm, honest and clear-sighted account of who and where we are now. Think, as Japan's Covid Games lurches from [crisis to crisis](#), about the excellence of the project itself, an Olympics without a significant blunder: buildings erected on time, stadiums created from scratch, regeneration of what was then one of the country's poorest districts kickstarted and continuing.

There were naysayers, particularly those who condemned the diversity and inclusivity projected by Boyle's opening show as "woke", though they had yet to adopt the noxious terminology. Back then everything they didn't like or felt threatened by was "politically correct". Still, most others were proud to see a presentation to the world of not exactly who we are – it was too perfect for that – but a snapshot of the modern nation we would like to be.

The ensuing tragedy was that we didn't exploit the potential of that moment and before long we were consumed by the painful divisions of austerity and the social splintering of Brexit. So we have had sight of a reset button before. We just never pushed it. With the World Cup next year, can this [England](#) team carve out another opportunity for appraisal, perhaps renewal? We must hope it can, not least because our politics seems incapable.

There is still reason for hope. As a British, black Londoner, son of Windrush generation, working-class parents, I – like so many others with different stories – find it has never been [easier to support](#) an England team. It's southern, it's northern, it's black, it's white, it is of mixed heritage, it's young, it's experienced, I'm guessing it's multi-denominational. It has players who excel at their jobs and earn a fortune doing them but try in various ways to ground themselves in the lives of the society of which they are a feted part. They do good things, we read about them in the tabloids, they do stupid things, we read about them in the tabloids. They sport silly tattoos, some have silly haircuts. In short, they are instantly recognisable as young Britain right now, as seen daily – in shape and form, if not in outsized wealth – on every UK high street. Some of us have long made the practical and moral argument that Britain's diversity is its strength. This England team makes that case.

As for Gareth Southgate, he has been feted and rightly so, but the extent to which tabloids deify him says much about our predicament. To me, he is just a prominent example of a British type we used to revere: thoughtful, strong-willed and [confident but not flashy](#), centred, emotionally intelligent and decent. If he seems exceptional now, that's not just about him but also because our lives are being shaped by characters who mask any pretension to decency or seriousness or even intelligence to succeed in the pantomime that is political life.

Worth noting that, away from the hullabaloo, there are others like Southgate in our world-beating creative arts, in public administration, in our big and small commercial companies, and together they support one conclusion; there really is no need in our public sphere for so much showboating and immaturity.

So we lost on Sunday, and that's a shame. Instead of glory and a cup, a near miss and a bit more baggage. But don't blame the players. They did their bit and they'll do their bit again. Perhaps the best way to show thanks would be to fashion a fair, progressive and confident country at one with the team.

- Hugh Muir is an editor at the Guardian
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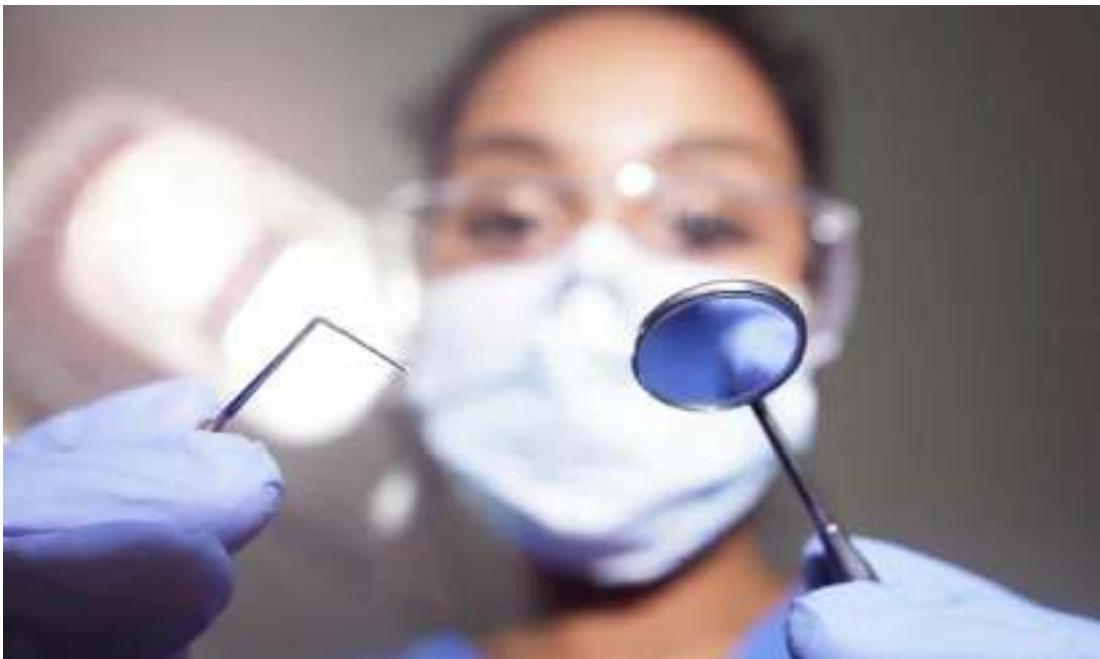
[OpinionDentists](#)

What 22 years of terrible gum disease has taught me about pain, shame and politics

Zoe Williams



When a dentist is holding something sharp in your mouth, you need them to be infinitely accepting of you and your behaviour. A person like that is hard to find



‘It doesn’t hurt,’ she said. ‘Think of it like scraping the barnacles off the side of a ship.’ Photograph: Peter Cade/Getty

‘It doesn’t hurt,’ she said. ‘Think of it like scraping the barnacles off the side of a ship.’ Photograph: Peter Cade/Getty

Mon 12 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

I need to talk about my 22 years of chronic periodontitis and all the wisdom I’ve gained from it. People who’ve never heard of it look nonplussed when you tell them it’s a fancy word for gum disease, while the people who have heard of it, well, that’s because they’ve also got it. We’re more important on this occasion, because our lives are worse.

It’s sometimes genetic but more often because you smoke, and it’s definitely not genetic in my case because my mother last went to the dentist in 1987 and still has more teeth than me. Thirty-four years ago, a dentist said to her: “Next time, try not to be so neurotic,” and she never went back. That’s how good she is at taking criticism. That bit *is* genetic.

So it must have been the smoking. It was first identified by an oral health professional who said: “You’re 25, you have the bone density of a 45-year-old, and you will not reach that age with teeth if you don’t get it under control.” I gave this my full attention. “Does that mean, if I met a violent

death and they were using my dental records to identify my body, they would get my age completely wrong and I might never get justice?" "No," he said. "They would say: '25-year-old female, who was a very heavy smoker without a toothbrush.'" I found him very judgmental. The aspect you're looking for, when someone's in your mouth, especially if they're holding something sharp, is infinite acceptance. The feelings are deeper than fear and pain – your brain is helpfully also splicing in shame, vulnerability and a newly pressing knowledge of death. Plus, it's mad expensive.

By happy coincidence, my younger sister was studying dentistry at the time; she was on her gum module, she needed guinea pigs for the root planing treatment that I was after, and it would be free. So I went along to her, but I should preface that we didn't get on that well at the time.

Each tooth has to be rigorously scraped with a series of tools, many of them attached to the mains. "It doesn't hurt," she said. "Think of it like scraping the barnacles off the side of a ship." Well, sure, that wouldn't hurt at all, unless the ship was your tooth and the sea was your gum, and you had easily as many nerve endings as Dustin Hoffman in Marathon Man, just a less expressive face.

She eventually agreed to anaesthetise me, but they were obviously saving the tutorial on injections for some other term. By the time I was anywhere near numb, I'd had about nine, and I was very pale, and my heart was pounding, even though I wasn't scared, just annoyed. The supervisor approached, incredibly fast, or was time moving in and out as I slipped towards unconsciousness? He ended up tipping me almost upside down in the chair because he thought I might faint, and stroking my hand like I was a rabbit who'd had a nasty surprise. The worst bit was, we hadn't told him we were sisters – she thought that might not be allowed – so I had to fake infinite patience with the student dentist, like a decent person behind a learner driver, when what I wanted to say was: "Did you do that on purpose?" Or: "Why didn't you tell me you were bad at this?"

Then, when I was in my mid-30s, I met D. By this time, one of my teeth was mobile – such a cheering word applied to any other part of your body, such a death knell for a tooth – and I was pretty accustomed to the awful look on a dentist's face whenever I opened my mouth. She never gilded the lily, so I

still found the experience pretty bracing, but she had a number of very strong views, all of which I agreed with.

It was the middle of the Greek debt crisis, and she's from [Greece](#). "It is absurd, this line that the Greeks are simply lazier than the Germans." "Gnnn!" "Per capita productivity is actually higher in [Greece](#)." "Yng!" Turns out the noise I make in affirmation, with my mouth open, is a lot like my polite howl of pain. So it took a couple of conversations to iron that out. Now, if something hurts or I disagree, I raise my hand, and all noises are consensus. It's like a Momentum meeting. She also has a very strong sense of her own value – "You see, I'm at the top of my field" "Grrr!" – which I find reassuring and admirable.

Lockdown happened, and she got pregnant, then left the practice, which tried to refer me to someone else, and I said they didn't understand – I needed someone at the top of their field, who thought [Yanis Varoufakis](#) was great at dealing with the European council, but problematic as a democratic organiser.

Recently, D resurfaced, and life, certainly as it relates to my face, got good again. I can't stress this enough: find a dentist whose politics you like, and the fear, pain, shame, vulnerability and inevitability of death don't seem so important.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion Afghanistan](#)

History shows us that outsiders can never bring peace to Afghanistan

[Tamim Ansary](#)

The US and British withdrawal has set off panic, but the truth is they were exacerbating the problem they were trying to solve



‘What Afghans really need help with is getting everyone else to leave them alone.’ A British army flag-lowering ceremony. Photograph: Ministry of Defence/Getty Images

‘What Afghans really need help with is getting everyone else to leave them alone.’ A British army flag-lowering ceremony. Photograph: Ministry of Defence/Getty Images

Mon 12 Jul 2021 04.00 EDT

Friends keep asking me to sign petitions urging President Biden to change his mind about [withdrawing troops](#) from Afghanistan. They all agree that the US can't stay in the country for ever but this, they say, is not the time to

leave: the Taliban are surging, and the social gains of the past 20 years are in jeopardy.

I've not signed any of those petitions. Yes, the Taliban have committed horrific offences, and they won't stop. And they must be stopped. Just the other day I saw a video of villagers in northern Afghanistan burying a dozen civilians killed by a bomb: an old woman wept because her whole family had been wiped out. Oh, but wait – that bomb was dropped by the government, delivered by drone.

Both sides in this war kill civilians. I'd sign any petition that would stop the fighting and bring peace. What's more, when this war ends, I hope the government now in Kabul emerges victorious. I hope Afghans resume their social and material progress on every front. But I can't forget a pattern of Afghan history so blatant that I'm amazed it's not central to this conversation.

The government in Kabul has never been able to secure authority in Afghanistan as a whole when it is held in place by an outside power's military.

In 1839, the British replaced the Afghan monarch Dost Mohammed with his rival Shah Shuja, who had just as legitimate a claim to the throne as he. But the British had put him in power, so the country went up in flames and two years later the whole British community in Kabul had to flee on foot, most of them dying on the way out.

In 1878 the British tried again: this time, they ousted Afghan ruler Sher Ali and tried to rule the country through his son, Yaqub. Sure enough, the British cantonment was sacked, their representative was killed, the country went up in flames. The British had to give up and leave the country to a strongman, Abdul Rahman, who knew what he needed to do to secure his position with Afghans: he made a deal with the British and Russia to keep them both out of Afghanistan.

Jump ahead to 1978: the Soviets helped Afghan communists topple the last of the Afghan ruling family and elevated their own man, Nur Muhammad Taraki, to power. What happened? The country went up in flames. The

Soviets sent in 100,000 troops to keep the communists in power, but that only turned the fire into a bonfire. The war raged for 10 years until at last the Soviets simply left – with the country eviscerated.

Then came the Americans. They dropped a fully formed government on to Kabul, picked Hamid Karzai to run the country, and clothed him in all the markers of legitimacy recognised in western democracies: constitution, parliament, elections. Under Karzai, girls went back to school, women's rights improved, infrastructure was restored, progress was made.

Sure enough, however, as with all the previous great power attempts to manage Afghans through Afghan proxies, Kabul proved unable to secure countrywide legitimacy. Resistance brewed in the villages and spread to the cities.

[Taliban sweep through Herat province as Afghan advance continues](#)

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In its war with forces based in the countryside, the Kabul government was hobbled by one huge disadvantage – the outside military forces that were helping it hold power. Because of that, it had no narrative to counter the one the [Taliban](#) wielded, which said: the government in Kabul isn't Afghan, it's a bunch of puppets and proxies for Americans and Europeans whose main agenda is to undermine Islam. Drones and bombs could not defeat that narrative but only feed it.

The US and Nato can't stay in Afghanistan for ever, but is this the time to leave? The answer has to be yes if, as I am arguing, the US and Nato military presence in Afghanistan is causing the very problem it is supposed to be solving.

Many people assume the Taliban are the face of what Afghanistan would be without US help. But the American military presence might be obscuring the single most crucial fact: the Taliban don't represent Afghan culture. They too are, in a sense, an alien force.

Before the Soviet invasion 40 years ago, it's fair to say most Afghans were deeply devoted Muslims. The underlying issue among Afghans was not

Islam or not-Islam but which version of Islam: Kabul's urban, progressive version or the conservative version of the villages. Afghans involved in that debate were the ones who rose up against the Soviet invaders.

But the Taliban are not those Afghans. The Taliban originated in the refugee camps of Pakistan. Their worldview was moulded in religious schools funded by elements of Pakistan's military intelligence agency. They were armed by Islamists from the Arab world, some of whom are in the country now, calling themselves Taliban. If the western military presence were removed, the Afghan energy that refuses to accept outsiders telling them who to be might recognise the Taliban as the alien force.

The great irony of the western project to bring democracy and social progress to Afghanistan is this: Afghans have a powerful progressive current of their own. It's Islamic, not secular, but it is progressive. In the six decades after the country gained independence from the British and before it was invaded by the Soviets, Afghanistan was governed by Afghans. During that time, what did that Afghan government achieve? It liberated Afghan women from the previously obligatory burqa. It promulgated a constitution. It created a parliament with real legislative power. It set up elections. It built schools for girls nationwide. It pushed for coeducation. It opened women's access to a college education at Kabul University and it opened public employment opportunities for them in professions such as medicine and law. It is staggering to look back at that era.

As the US and British withdrawal proceeds, the country is surrounded by outside forces hungering to get in: Pakistan, Iran, Russia, India, China. Before any of them succeed, there ought to be a global conference at which international actors can work out a way to keep one another out of Afghanistan. For what Afghans really need help with is getting everyone else to leave them alone.

- Tamim Ansary is the author of Games Without Rules: The Often-Interrupted History of Afghanistan

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The NHS is already overstretched – dropping Covid restrictions will spell disaster for patients

[Rachel Clarke](#)



For every Covid case we take in, we erode our capacity to treat those with cancer or heart disease, increasing our backlog



Illustration: Matt Kenyon/The Guardian

Illustration: Matt Kenyon/The Guardian

Sun 11 Jul 2021 10.00 EDT

You have to hand it to Sajid Javid for sheer, barefaced doublespeak. At the start of the month he wrote an [emollient letter](#) to every single one of the NHS's 1.3 million staff to assure us he felt "a deep affection for the NHS, and the brilliant people who work there". Even better, the new health secretary insisted: "I want to give you what you need to recover from this difficult period, and make it as easy as possible for you to do your job."

Well. How we longed just this once to believe our secretary of state. Alas, it took a mere two days for him to go back on his words. Javid wrote an [op ed for the Mail on Sunday](#) in which he declared that opening up Britain, even as Covid cases soar stratospherically, would give us a country "that is not just freer, but healthier, too". Then the prime minister issued the coup de grace, officially announcing his much-trailed new policy of binning all pretence at controlling Covid because if not now, when? I don't know, we tried to mutter through our broken teeth, maybe when a few more people have been vaccinated?

It's a struggle to put this in printable terms, but Javid needs to understand there are a few things that will definitely *not* help NHS staff do our jobs. A [George Cross](#), for instance. A badge, of any description. Another round of fulsome clapping from the steps of No 10. But, and this really is the kicker, the one thing that will absolutely not help is the decision to launch a nationwide experiment in which Covid will be allowed to let rip through an unchecked, super-exponential growth phase.

As a senior colleague put it to me: "Are they fucking mad?" To which I could only stare at the floor, feeling desperate. For this is where we are. The UK population, whether we like it or not, is now Boris Johnson's personal petri dish. Yet before we even reach the projected [100,000 new cases of Covid](#) a day, the NHS – as both Johnson and Javid must know – is already on its knees. The question of whether the workforce will be able to cope is entirely academic. Demand is *already* unmanageable, staff are *already* sounding the alarm in droves and patient safety is *already* being compromised in hospitals up and down the country.

Take the hospitals where I work. We have run out of beds multiple times this year, not only during the last Covid surge in January but many times since, when pressures were supposedly abating. Our recent waiting times in A&E have routinely topped six, seven or even eight hours. We have found ourselves back in the dark old days of gravely unwell patients lining trolleys in corridors, with all the misery and indignity that entails. And we are no outlier. Last month, the vice-president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, Dr Adrian Boyle, [warned of the risks](#) of overwhelmed A&E departments leading to avoidable deaths: "What's been going on for the last six weeks, the levels of activity we are seeing, is creating a significant and sustained threat to patient safety ... We know research evidence has consistently demonstrated that excessive occupancy in emergency departments is inevitably associated with an increase in short-term mortality."

Javid only needs to glance at social media to see the torrent of ever more frantic posts from NHS staff at the end of their tether. One A&E doctor in a district general hospital [tweeted that](#) their department's highest ever recorded number of attendances in 24 hours has been broken by 10.4%. Another doctor told me: "I work in a hospital with an A&E capacity of 180

patients. Yesterday at 9am there were 300 patients down there ... Don't anyone try to tell me numbers are manageable, it's total crap."

An [NHS](#) consultant friend in London, who is too worried of repercussions for me to share her name, sounded wretched when I called her: "It feels inhumane. Our emergency department is spilling over. Patients are scared, unsure of where else to go, worried that their diagnosis has been missed. But staff have suffered the psychological impact of the pandemic too ... It feels like we've been set up to fail."

This is the crux. Too many frontline staff (as Javid, again, has to know) are broken and burnt out after 18 months of Covid. Nearly half of NHS critical care staff, for instance, have reported symptoms of PTSD, depression or anxiety, with [one in five ICU nurses](#) expressing thoughts of suicide or self-harm. As the entire workforce grapples with the pandemic backlog – [more than 5 million patients](#) now languish on waiting lists – morale has never been lower.

I am not, then, dismayed by the government's decision to pour petrol on Covid numbers. I am disgusted. Of all people, a health secretary who used to be a banker should understand that a pandemic, in a profound sense, is a numbers game. There is a remorseless logic to exponential statistics, which is why, no doubt, the government is refusing to make public its modelling for Covid hospitalisations and deaths this summer. We stopped following the science long ago. I suppose it was only a matter of time before Boris Johnson would actively suppress it, urging people to take "[personal responsibility](#)" for decisions about which he is deliberately keeping them in the dark.

Distressingly, frontline staff know exactly what is coming because we are already inhabiting its foothills. This week, some hospitals were opening up additional overspill Covid wards as new patients overwhelmed the existing ones. Other hospitals are being forced to [cancel vital operations](#), including cancer surgery, because there are no ICU beds in which to care for the patients post-operatively. If, as the health secretary said over the weekend, [dealing with the backlog](#) is one of his top priorities, he would not be removing social distancing restrictions.

Can you imagine what it feels like, [Sajid Javid](#), to hold someone's gaze as you break the unforgivable news, on the very morning they expect to be anaesthetised, that you have been forced to cancel their life-or-death surgery? No, of course you can't. You force us to play a zero-sum game in which every extra patient with Covid erodes a little more of our capacity to care for someone else without. You are, in short, championing a policy that directly harms all patients, whether they have Covid, cancer, heart disease, dementia, mental illness, a car crash or a brain haemorrhage. It turns my stomach even to think of it.

- Rachel Clarke is a palliative care doctor and the author of [Breathtaking: Inside the NHS in a Time of Pandemic](#)

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Haiti police say murder suspect is middleman living in Florida

Items found at Christian Emmanuel Sanon's house include bullets, gun parts and US drug agency hat



People walk past a wall in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, with a mural depicting President Jovenel Moïse, who was shot dead last week. Photograph: Reuters

People walk past a wall in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, with a mural depicting President Jovenel Moïse, who was shot dead last week. Photograph: Reuters

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Mon 12 Jul 2021 08.01 EDT

Police in Haiti say they have arrested a new suspect in the [assassination of the country's president, Jovenel Moïse](#) – a Haitian living in Florida who

arrived on a private plane in June allegedly to act as a middleman between the alleged hitmen and the plot's unnamed masterminds.

As [Haiti](#) descended ever deeper into a dangerous political chaos, with notorious gang leader Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier calling on Haitians to "mobilise", the motive for the killing of Moïse remained unknown.

The latest suspect was identified by police as Christian Emmanuel Sanon, a Haitian in his 60s living in Florida who describes himself as a doctor and has accused his homeland's leaders of corruption.

[Haiti president's assassination: what we know so far](#)

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"He arrived by private plane in June with political objectives and contacted a private security firm to recruit the people who committed this act," Haiti's police chief, Léon Charles, said, describing a private Venezuelan security company based in Florida called CTU.

The wife of at least one Colombian arrested for his part in the attack, Francisco Uribe, has claimed CTU offered her husband around \$2,700 (£1,950) a month to work in Haiti. According to newly disclosed details, CTU also bought the tickets to Haiti for a number of Colombians implicated in the plot.

The head of Haiti's police, Léon Charles, accused Sanon of working with those who plotted and participated in Moïse's killing, which [plunged the nation of more than 11 million people into uncertainty](#).

It remained unclear, however, whether Sanon was the alleged key mover – although some news sources suggested he had ambitions to be president – or how a former bankrupt in Florida had either financed the plot or planned to seize power.

Four men have made claims to lead the country's government since the assassination, including the acting prime minister, Claude Joseph, and Ariel Henry, whom Moïse appointed prime minister two days before his death.

The police chief said that among the items found by officers at Sanon's house in Haiti were a hat with the logo of the US Drug Enforcement Administration. Moïse's killers had claimed to be DEA agents when they assaulted his home

Also reported found were 20 boxes of bullets, gun parts, four vehicle licence plates from the Dominican Republic, two cars and correspondence with unidentified people.

Laurent Dubois, a Haiti expert and Duke University professor, said questions over Moïse's assassination could remain unanswered for a long time. "There are so many potential players who could be behind it," he said. "There is going to be some jockeying for positions of power. That is one big worry."

The intervention by Cherizier, who leads the G9 and Allies gang federation – which critics say has been used for politically motivated killings – has added to an already febrile atmosphere, with Cherizier railing against police and opposition politicians whom he accused of colluding with the "stinking bourgeoisie" to "sacrifice" Moïse.

"It was a national and international conspiracy against the Haitian people," he said in a video address, dressed in khaki military fatigues and sitting in front of a Haitian flag.

"We tell all bases to mobilise, to mobilise and take to the streets for light to be shed on the president's assassination."

Haitian authorities [claim a 28-member hit squad](#) stormed Moïse's presidential compound in the early hours of last Wednesday before shooting him dead – a sensational narrative [coming under increasing scrutiny](#), both in Haiti and overseas.

Charles said Sanon was in contact with a firm that provides security for politicians and recruited the suspects in the killing, and that he accompanied several of the alleged hitmen on a flight into Haiti.

The gunmen's initial mission was to protect Sanon, but they later received orders to arrest the president, Charles said. "The operation started from there," he said, adding that an additional 22 suspects joined the group and that contact was made with Haitian citizens.

Eighteen Colombians have been arrested so far, along with three Haitians. Charles said five of the suspects were still at large and at least three had been killed, including Capador.

"They are dangerous individuals," Charles said. "I'm talking commando, specialised commando."

Charles said that after Moïse was killed, one of the suspects phoned Sanon, who then got in touch with two people police believe to be the masterminds. He did not identify them or say if police knew who they are.

Colombian police said on Monday that they could not share any hypothesis about the murder of Moïse.

"We cannot construct any hypothesis," said General Jorge Luis Vargas, head of the Colombian national police. "We respect the judicial autonomy of the Haitian state and its authorities."

However, Vargas said Colombian police were investigating the activities of a Haitian man named Dimitri Herard, who served as Moïse's head of security. Herard transited through Colombia multiple times earlier this year, Vargas added, during trips to Ecuador and the Dominican Republic between January and May.

Colombian police are investigating Herard's activities during his visits, Vargas said. However authorities have yet to establish a direct link between Mr Herard and the captured former soldiers, officials said.

He said Haitian authorities obtained the information from interrogations and other parts of the investigation. He added that police were working with high-ranking Colombian officials to identify details of the alleged plot, including when the suspects left Colombia and who paid for their tickets.

Sanon has lived in Florida, in Broward County and in Hillsborough County on the Gulf Coast. Records show he also lived in Kansas City, Missouri. He filed for bankruptcy in 2013 and identifies himself as a doctor in a video on YouTube titled “Leadership for Haiti”.

In the video, he denounces the leaders of Haiti as corrupt and accuses them of stripping the country of its resources, saying: “They don’t care about the country, they don’t care about the people.”

He claims Haiti has uranium, oil and other resources that have been taken by government officials.

“This is a country with resources,” he said. “Nine million people can’t be in poverty when we have so much resources in the country. It’s impossible ... The world has to stop doing what they are doing right now. We can’t take it any more. We need new leadership that will change the way of life.”

Sanon has posted little on Twitter but has expressed an interest in Haitian politics. In September 2010, he tweeted: “Just completed a successful conference in Port-au-Prince. Many people from the opposition attended.” A month later, he wrote: “Back to Haiti for an important meeting regarding the election. Pray for me for protection and wisdom.”

While the streets were calm on Sunday, government officials worry about what lies ahead and have requested US and UN military assistance.

Associated Press contributed to this report

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[Haiti](#)

Haiti crisis deepens as alleged hitman's sister vows to clear his name

Duberney Capador, killed after assassination of Jovenel Moïse, was hired by security firm to protect 'important people', says sister



Duberney Capador, a former Colombian soldier, was killed by Haitian forces during an operation to capture those allegedly implicated in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. Photograph: Jenny Capador Giraldo/Reuters

Duberney Capador, a former Colombian soldier, was killed by Haitian forces during an operation to capture those allegedly implicated in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. Photograph: Jenny Capador Giraldo/Reuters

[Tom Phillips](#) Latin America correspondent

Sun 11 Jul 2021 13.12 EDT

The sister of one of the alleged Colombian hitmen accused of assassinating Haiti's president has insisted he is innocent and vowed to clear her dead brother's name, as a potentially destabilising power struggle gripped the Caribbean country.

Duberney Capador, a retired member of Colombia's special forces, was one of two Colombians [reportedly killed by Haitian security forces](#) last week after [the assassination of Jovenel Moïse in Port-au-Prince](#). More than a dozen citizens of the South American country have so far been arrested, as well as two Haitian Americans.

Haitian authorities [claim Capador was part of a 28-member hit squad](#) that stormed Moïse's presidential compound in the early hours of last Wednesday before shooting him dead – a sensational narrative [now coming under increasing scrutiny](#), both in Haiti and overseas.

Capador's sister told journalists her 40-year-old brother was not a paid assassin but had travelled to Port-au-Prince after being hired by a private security firm to help protect "important people". "He's no mercenary, he's a good man," Jenny Capador said in [an interview](#) with the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo.

Capador said she had exchanged messages with her brother in the hours after Moïse's murder, which supposedly took place at around 1am on Wednesday. She said he had told her his team "had arrived too late to protect the person they were supposed to be protecting". "I guess it was the president," she speculated, adding that her brother had told her his group had subsequently been surrounded by police.

[Speaking to CNN](#) Capador added: "He told me they were in a house, under siege and under fire, fighting ... I'm 100% sure of the innocence of my brother and his comrades."



Duberney Capador. Photograph: Jenny Capador Giraldo/Reuters

Haitian police said a 16th Colombian suspect was captured on Saturday and that they were continuing to hunt five other “villains” they suspected of involvement in the bizarre and brazen attack. The latest man to be arrested was named as Gersaín Mendivelso Jaimes, another former member of Colombia’s military who had served in the naval hospital in Cartagena, on the country’s Caribbean coast. *El Tiempo* said authorities believed Mendivelso had helped recruit the Colombian group, which travelled to Haiti via the Dominican Republic, but the exact nature of their mission remains a mystery.

[A report](#) in the Colombian magazine *Semana*, citing an anonymous source, suggested the former Colombian soldiers had gone to Haiti after being hired to protect Moïse, who had reputedly been receiving death threats, not murder him. *Semana* [published](#) extracts from a WhatsApp message sent by one of the jailed Colombians – a former army sergeant called Ángel Mario Yarce – in which he told his wife their job was to provide close protection to high-profile dignitaries.

In Haiti, questions have been raised over the role of Moïse’s personal bodyguards – none of whom were reportedly injured in the alleged raid on his hillside mansion.

On Friday, Steven Benoit, a prominent opposition politician and former senator, told the local radio station Magik9: “The president was assassinated by his own guards, not by the Colombians.”

Moïse’s murder threatens to aggravate an already desperate situation in Haiti, which was facing a political deadlock, economic turmoil, a wave of kidnappings and violence, and an accelerating Covid crisis. In the wake of the president’s assassination at least three politicians have attempted to claim leadership over the crisis-stricken nation, whose post-colonial history is a patchwork of bungled foreign interventions, vicious and corrupt dictatorships, and natural disasters such as the devastating 2010 earthquake which claimed an estimated 200,000 lives.



A news vendor sells local newspapers with the news of the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, in Port-au-Prince. Photograph: Ricardo Arduengo/Reuters

Haiti’s outgoing prime minister, Claude Joseph, who had been dismissed in the days leading up to Moïse’s assassination, has declared himself interim leader until planned elections in September, and been recognised by countries including the United States.

But two other politicians – senate chief Joseph Lambert, and the man Moïse had intended to install as prime minister, a neurosurgeon called Ariel Henry – have said they should be in charge.

[Jovenel Moïse obituary](#)

[Read more](#)

“His way of acting could put the country in jeopardy. We could have a lot of violence,” Henry warned of Joseph’s bid to claim power in [an interview](#) with the Washington Post.

If the true identity of Moïse’s executioners remains murky, even less is known about the masterminds of the crime. In a statement posted on social media on Saturday Martine Moïse, the late president’s wife, blamed his killing on shadowy enemies with political motives whom she did not identify.

“This act has no name because you have to be a limitless criminal to assassinate a president like Jovenel Moïse, without even giving him the chance to say a single word,” she said.

“You know who the president was fighting against,” she said, without expanding further.

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California

Wildfires blaze across western states as heatwave shatters records

Warning of potential for ‘extreme growth’ of Oregon blaze as two die in Arizona fire reconnaissance plane crash



A firefighter sprays water while trying to stop the Sugar Fire, part of the Beckwourth Complex Fire, from spreading to neighboring homes in Doyle, California, on Saturday. Photograph: Noah Berger/AP

A firefighter sprays water while trying to stop the Sugar Fire, part of the Beckwourth Complex Fire, from spreading to neighboring homes in Doyle, California, on Saturday. Photograph: Noah Berger/AP

Guardian staff and agency

Mon 12 Jul 2021 20.48 EDT

Firefighters are working in extreme heat to contain a number of wildfires raging across the US west, with the largest burning in California and Oregon, as another heatwave bakes the region and puts strain on power grids.

The Beckwourth Complex, which is the largest wildfire of the year in California, was raging along the [Nevada](#) state line and has burned about 140 sq miles (362 sq km) as of Monday. State regulators have asked consumers to voluntarily “conserve as much electricity as possible” to avoid any outages starting in the afternoon.

[In California’s interior, there’s no escape from the desperate heat: ‘Why are we even here?’](#)

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In [Oregon](#), the Bootleg fire exploded to 240 sq miles as it raced through heavy timber in the Fremont-Winema national forest, near the Klamath county town of Sprague River. The fire has put pressure on the power grid of neighbouring California, disrupting service on three transmission lines providing up to 5,500 megawatts of electricity to the state. Hundreds of residents in the Klamath Falls area are under mandatory evacuation orders.

“The Bootleg fire will see the potential for extreme growth today,” said the National Weather Service in Medford, Oregon.

And in south-east Washington state, a wildfire has grown to almost 60 sq miles while in [Idaho](#), Governor Brad Little has mobilized the national guard to help fight fires sparked after lightning storms swept across the drought-stricken region.

The blazes are spreading as extreme temperatures continue to blast the American west, with excessive heat warnings remaining in many places on Monday. Over the weekend, Death Valley hit a scorching 130F, marking [what could be](#) the highest reliably recorded ambient temperature on Earth. Palm Springs in southern California hit a record high temperature of 120F on Saturday, while Las Vegas tied the all-time record high of 117F.



A California man clears a fire break around his home as the Beckwourth Complex fire burns in the north-east of the state. Photograph: Noah Berger/AP

The National Weather Service warned the dangerous conditions could cause heat-related illnesses.

In [Arizona](#), a small plane crashed on Saturday during a survey of a wildfire in rural Mohave county, killing both crew members on board. The Beech C-90 aircraft was helping perform reconnaissance over the lightning-caused Cedar Basin fire, which was sparked by lightening near the tiny community of Wikieup, north-west of Phoenix, when it went down around noon.

Officials identified the victims as Jeff Piechura, 62, a retired Tucson-area fire chief who was working for the Coronado national forest, and Matthew Miller, 48, a pilot with Falcon Executive Aviation contracted by the US Forest Service. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating.

[My new climate reality? Packing a ‘firebag’ so I can flee at the drop of a hat](#)
[| Michelle Nijhuis](#)

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“Our hearts go out to the families of our brave wildland firefighters,” an Arizona Bureau of Land Management spokesperson said.

The Beckwourth Complex fire – a combination of two lightning-caused blazes burning 45 miles north of Lake Tahoe – is burning near the California-Nevada border after exploding in size over the weekend.

Plumas national forest officials said firefighters had successfully contained almost a quarter of the blaze but still expected some extreme fire activity.

Evacuation orders were in effect for more than 3,000 residents of remote areas of California’s Lassen and Plumas counties and Nevada’s Washoe county. Some structures were destroyed over the weekend in Doyle, California, a town of about 600 residents.

“A damage assessment team has arrived to validate and assess reports of structures damaged or destroyed,” a forest statement said.

A new fire broke out Sunday afternoon in the Sierra Nevada south of Yosemite national park and by evening had exploded over more than six sq miles (15.5 sq km), triggering evacuations in areas of two counties. The fire’s size, however, remained unchanged early on Monday and was 5% contained. A highway that leads to Yosemite’s southern entrance remained open.

Bob Prary, who manages the Buck-Inn Bar in Doyle, said he saw at least six houses destroyed.

“It seems like the worst is over in town, but back on the mountainside the fire’s still going strong. Not sure what’s going to happen if the wind changes direction,” Prary said.

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[Jordan](#)

Jordan jails two ex-officials for 15 years over alleged royal plot

Bassem Awadallah and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, aides of Prince Hamzah, convicted of sedition after month-long trial



Security members stand guard outside the court in Amman where the two men were sentenced. Photograph: Muath Freij/Reuters

Security members stand guard outside the court in Amman where the two men were sentenced. Photograph: Muath Freij/Reuters

[Martin Chulov](#), Middle East correspondent

Mon 12 Jul 2021 13.35 EDT

Two aides of a senior Jordanian royal accused of plotting against the country's monarch, [King Abdullah](#), have been sentenced to 15 years in prison by a state security court.

The convictions follow a month-long trial, held mostly behind closed doors, in the capital, Amman. Bassem Awadallah, a Jordanian national who also holds Saudi and US citizenship, and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a member of the royal family, were found guilty of sedition after being accused of acting as proxies for the king's half-brother, Prince Hamzah, who officials claim had conspired to unseat Abdullah.

State prosecutors and intelligence officials had accused the two men of attempting to rally tribal leaders behind Hamzah, who was removed from the line of succession to the throne by Abdullah in 2004.

Officials claimed both had used a series of events in Jordan in March to ramp up efforts to promote Hamzah. They characterised their alleged actions as incitement but said they fell short of being a coup.

[Did Jordan's closest allies plot to unseat its king?](#)

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Senior Jordanian officials [told the Guardian in May](#) they feared that all three men had been acting as proxies, wittingly or not, for the Trump administration and the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. Both the former US president and Prince Mohammed had seen King Abdullah as an obstacle to the implementation of the so-called "deal of the century", an imposed solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict whose terms would have undermined the Jordanian throne.

Abdullah had refused to cooperate with the plan, earning the ire of Donald Trump's son-in-law and Middle East envoy, [Jared Kushner](#). The senior officials believed Awadallah, who has close ties to the Saudi royal court, may have been groomed for senior positions under Hamzah.

Abdullah was warned of the alleged plot by US officials in April, by which time Trump had left office and Kushner had lost his influence. Jordanian spies then monitored all three men, [tapping their phones](#) and listening to meetings with tribesmen. Some of the recordings were presented to the court in transcript form.

Last week, Israeli media reported that the country's new prime minister, Naftali Bennett, had met with Abdullah during an unannounced trip to Amman aimed at restoring relations that had been damaged under Benjamin Netanyahu, a close ally of Trump and Prince Mohammed.

Jordanian officials believe that any Trump-led conspiracy did not involve the US or Israeli security establishments, both of which maintain close ties with Jordan. Amman receives an estimated \$1.5bn (£1bn) from Washington annually.

Before the trial, [Hamzah had reached an accommodation with the royal court](#) and was not charged. However, he remains under a form of house arrest. He denied the allegations against him in video statements released in April. Lawyers for Awadallah and Sharif Hassan said they would appeal against the verdicts.

A US-based lawyer for Awadallah claimed his client had been tortured in detention. The Jordanan prosecutor's office denied the claim and said torture allegations had only been raised as the court case drew to a close.

Abdullah is due in Washington next Monday, as the first Arab leader from the region to meet Joe Biden.

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Doctors warn of ‘devastating consequences’ of lifting Covid rules in England

Medical chiefs react to Boris Johnson’s ‘irresponsible’ decision to remove almost all Covid restrictions

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Boris Johnson returns to Downing Street after confirming the lifting of Covid restrictions from 19 July. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Boris Johnson returns to Downing Street after confirming the lifting of Covid restrictions from 19 July. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jessica Elgot](#) Deputy political editor

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 04.32 EDT

Senior doctors have warned of “potentially devastating consequences” after Boris Johnson confirmed on Monday that he would press ahead with lifting most remaining Covid restrictions in England on 19 July.

Speaking at a Downing Street press conference, the [prime minister urged “extreme caution”](#) for the final step of the roadmap, which will mean nightclubs can reopen, social distancing rules will be abandoned and mask-wearing will no longer be legally enforceable.

Warnings from the government’s scientific advisers suggested that the “exit wave” could result in more than 200 deaths a day and thousands of hospitalisations, though models by the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modeling (SPI-M) suggest median projections of about 400 deaths per day.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, the British Medical Association council chair, said a significant proportion of the population was still not fully vaccinated and that pressing ahead would allow the virus to “re-tighten its grip”, putting unsustainable pressure on the NHS.

“It’s irresponsible – and frankly perilous – that the government has decided to press ahead with plans to lift the remaining Covid-19 restrictions on 19 July,” he said.

“The BMA has repeatedly warned of the rapidly rising infection rate and the crippling impact that Covid-related hospitalisations continue to have on the NHS, not only pushing staff to the brink of collapse but also driving up already lengthy waiting times for elective care.

“The prime minister repeatedly emphasised the importance of a slow and cautious approach, but in reality the government is throwing caution to the wind by scrapping all regulations in one fell swoop – with potentially devastating consequences.”

Prof Helen Stokes-Lampard, the chairwoman of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, said her professional body did not usually comment on political decisions but said “we felt it necessary to say caution is vital” regarding 19 July.

“We need everyone to think very carefully and responsibly about what they’re doing personally: Just because the law changes doesn’t mean that what we do as individuals has to change,” she told ITV’s Good Morning Britain programme.

Prof Graham Medley, a member of Sage, said the summer peak of coronavirus as measures ease in England could last six weeks and heap a “considerable burden” on the NHS.

Medley, who chairs Spi-M, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “We’ve never seen a peak before that hasn’t been controlled. The intention is not to introduce a lockdown for this peak. Then we are going to see a natural peak and that may well be long and disseminated.

“So even if we don’t get up to very high numbers, the numbers that we get up to might last for several weeks, six weeks or so, in which case there’s still a considerable burden on healthcare. So, although we might not get over 2,000 admissions a day, if that lasts six weeks then that’s a lot of people.”

Medley said people’s behaviour after 19 July was “unknowable”, but said it was “likely that we will get between 1-2,000 hospitalisations a day”.

Stephen Barclay, the chief secretary to the Treasury, said businesses needed to be able to open up without restriction. “There’s no perfect time to do this. What we’ve done is deploy the vaccine – an extra 7m – opening when the schools are shut is seen as the optimum time to do so,” he said.

“It’s about getting that balance right, people reaching their own judgments, being sensible, following the guidance. But we also need to get back to normal, businesses need to fire up, we need to get the economy going, and those are important as well because there are consequences to not doing that, both economically and in terms of people’s health.”

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Rise in Covid cases will put intense pressure on NHS, bosses warn

Lifting of restrictions will mean service will struggle to tackle backlog of non-Covid care, hospital leaders say

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Intensive care specialists have expressed fear over plans to end restrictions such as mask wearing and say they are seeing a big increase in coronavirus admissions. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Intensive care specialists have expressed fear over plans to end restrictions such as mask wearing and say they are seeing a big increase in coronavirus admissions. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Mon 12 Jul 2021 15.22 EDT

The rise in infections that will follow the government's plans to reopen on 19 July will put intense pressure on the [NHS](#) and hit the service's attempts to tackle its huge backlog of care, hospital bosses have said.

They voiced deep unease that the lifting of almost all restrictions, and especially mandatory face masks, would put already busy hospitals under extra strain.

[Mixed messages: the changing government narrative on face masks](#)

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Dr Layla McCay, director of policy at the NHS Confederation, said many GP services and hospitals were already under greater pressure than is usual for the time of year and providing the amount of care they would usually offer in winter. “Already for some of our members, this is feeling unsustainable,” she said.

“The government itself is already warning of 100,000 Covid-19 cases a day in the coming weeks, and new numbers from Sage predict that we could soon see 1,000 hospitalisations a day, which will mean once again that the NHS will come under intense pressure and see the health service struggling to make inroads into the huge backlog of non-Covid treatment as quickly as it would like.

“Messages to go slowly, cautiously and steadily are right, but they are also open to wide interpretation, which is concerning when that interpretation may be reflected in the pressure our health system will experience over the coming weeks.”

Pat Cullen, acting general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, said: “Public mask-wearing is straightforward and well established – the government will rue the day it sent the wrong signal for political expediency.”

Doctors have voiced their alarm at the potential impact of unlocking on the NHS in recent days. Dr Richard Wenstone, an intensive care consultant in Liverpool, said last Saturday that the city's hospitals had experienced a big increase in Covid admissions, that it was in its "fourth wave" of cases, and that he and his colleagues were worried about the next few weeks.

"I think myself and a lot of my colleagues are fearful about what might happen," [Wenstone told the Liverpool Echo](#). "On the basis of what I'm seeing, I would say it's the wrong thing to do."

One of his colleagues, Dr Peter Hampshire, tweeted last Friday that isolation by personnel at their NHS trust, combined with colleagues taking summer holiday leave, "is causing carnage with staffing". That was affecting operating theatres, where surgical teams are trying to tackle the NHS's huge backlog of care, he added.

He bemoaned the lack of a plan to give the NHS more staff and more money to deal with Covid, and called the 19 July plan "bewildering".

Emergency departments are seeing huge numbers of patients & long waiting times.

2. Daily cases are around 35k & rising, lots of staff are off due to self-isolation or need to look after their kids. This, combined with leave over summer holidays is causing carnage with staffing.

— Peter Hampshire (@peterahampshire) [July 9, 2021](#)

On the same day Sarah-Jane Marsh, the chief executive of Birmingham Women and Children's NHS foundation trust, tweeted that the city was once again resurrecting its plans to deal with Covid. "No one has the physical or mental resilience for this wave, but it's here and so we must find some inner strength to start again," she said.

Chris Hopson, chief executive of hospitals group NHS Providers, told ministers that unlocking would inevitably limit their drive to cut waiting lists. The total number of people waiting for hospital treatment in England

stands at 5.3 million, but the health secretary, Sajid Javid, said on Sunday that it could soon hit 13 million.

Hopson said: “The NHS will need to treat increasing numbers of Covid-19 patients in hospital at a time when the service is going full pelt to recover backlogs, is seeing record emergency care demand for this time of year, is losing significant numbers of staff to self-isolation, and has much reduced capacity due to infection control.

“This will inevitably mean the NHS will be unable to recover care backlogs as fast as trusts and patients would like, and ministers should be clear about this trade-off. In this context, predictions of at least 1,000 Covid-19 admissions a day from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies are concerning.”

Rachel Power, chief executive of the Patients Association, said more hospitals [may have to cancel surgery](#), as at least one main acute trust, in Leeds, did last week.

She said: “The NHS should be given the breathing space to work through the backlog of treatment, which it won’t be able to do if cases escalate because all restrictions on our behaviours are lifted. If the health service cannot make a dent in waiting lists any time soon, that will mean more misery for patients.”

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From freedom to caution: a week of mixed messages on Covid reopening

Analysis: little has changed since last week's announcement but the mood music is very different



Boris Johnson during Monday's Downing Street press conference.
Photograph: Reuters

Boris Johnson during Monday's Downing Street press conference.
Photograph: Reuters

[Heather Stewart](#)

Mon 12 Jul 2021 15.23 EDT

It was the comedian Matt Lucas who best captured the jarring ambiguity in Boris Johnson's broadcast to the nation last May, as restrictions began to be lifted after the first lockdown. In a much-watched video, Lucas parodied it as: "Don't go to work; go to work; don't take public transport; go to work; don't go to work; stay indoors ..."

Dominic Cummings, Johnson's embittered former adviser, has since put it even more cruelly, comparing the prime minister's approach to managing the pandemic to "a shopping trolley smashing from one side of the aisle to the other".

After a week in which ministers have lurched from promising freedom to urging caution, even some senior Conservatives privately acknowledge that the messages emanating from the government in recent days have been almost as baffling.

Last Monday the new health secretary, Sajid Javid, told MPs boldly that "freedom is in our sights once again". His statement setting out the government's plan to lift almost all formal Covid restrictions was so well received by Tory backbenchers that one was heard to cry "hallelujah".

Johnson did warn the public at last week's Downing Street briefing that it was not time to be "demob happy" and stressed that he would keep wearing his mask in certain circumstances out of politeness. But the overall tone was of blessed release. He proudly suggested the new approach was a shift from "government diktat" to relying on "personal responsibility".

As the week went on, however, some of the practical risks with that approach became more evident. Javid conceded that pressing ahead with unlocking could mean 100,000 cases a day, which adds up to millions of people self-isolating, at least until the rules are changed on 16 August.

Ministers responded by announcing they would tweak the NHS Covid app to reduce its sensitivity – a move the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, compared to taking "the batteries out of the smoke alarm".

With distress signals already beginning to go up from various parts of the NHS, there were also growing jitters about what would happen if the public

read the scrapping of rules on masks and social gatherings not as a welcome return to personal responsibility but the green light for a summer free-for-all.

Meanwhile, the glee of Conservative backbenchers who have long railed against restrictions appeared not to be shared by the wider public, if polling is anything to go by.

And so it was that by Monday's press conference, Johnson was stressing "this pandemic is not over" and underlining the need for "[extreme caution](#)".

Little has changed in concrete terms since last week's announcement – masks will still not be mandatory from 19 July, nightclubs can still reopen and mass events can go ahead – but the mood music is very different, and the risks more openly acknowledged.

And Javid appears to have shifted within just a fortnight or so from boldly asserting after he replaced Matt Hancock that "it's going to be irreversible. There's no going back", to refusing to rule out reimposing restrictions if things get tough in the winter – perhaps in the face of alarming projections from Sage.

The chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, stressed at Monday's press conference the importance of "going very slowly through this step".

Last spring, ministers were consistently surprised by how well the public complied with the detailed and draconian rules governing their everyday lives. Much now will depend on how they now shoulder the responsibility of judging the risks for themselves. And that may depend in turn on which of the government's mixed messages they have heard loudest.

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‘Covid has been a big catalyst’: universities plan for post-pandemic life



Edinburgh University students protest against the false promise of ‘hybrid learning’ to new and returning students on 24 October, 2020. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Edinburgh University students protest against the false promise of ‘hybrid learning’ to new and returning students on 24 October, 2020. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

The learning experience for students across UK’s higher institutions may never be the same again

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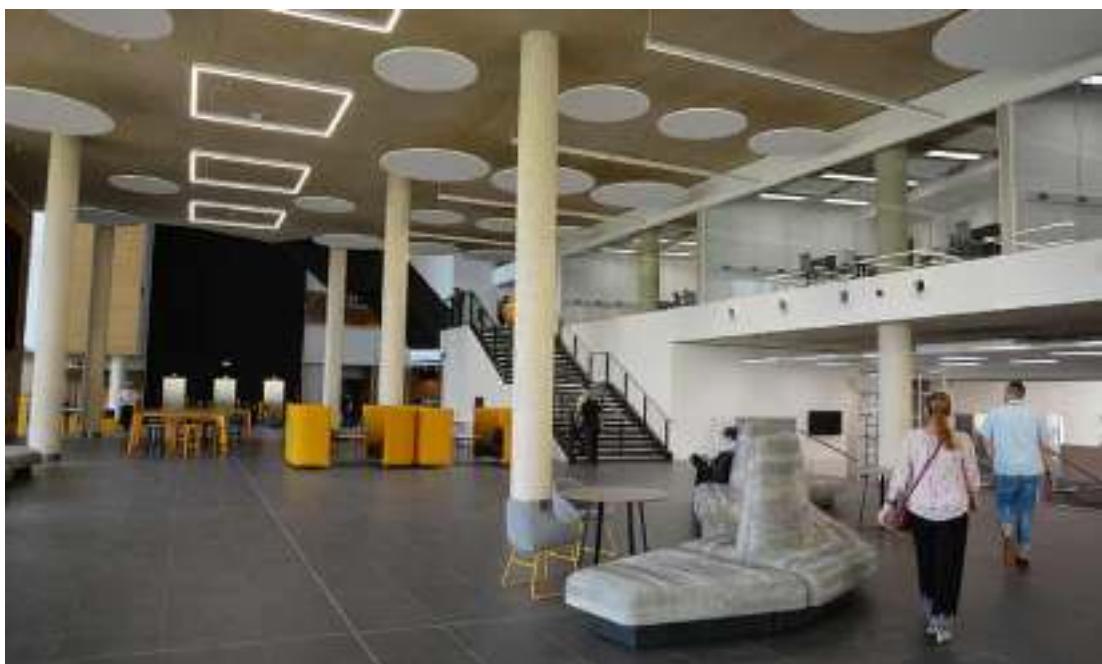
Sally Weale and Richard Adams

Tue 13 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

[Manchester University](#) this week became the first institution to confirm that lectures will remain permanently online, and responses to enquiries by the Guardian suggest it is unlikely to be the last, with many vice-chancellors keen to retain and build on changes wrought by the pandemic.

The lifting of Covid restrictions on 19 July, announced by the government this week, will allow for a full return to face-to-face teaching in [higher education](#), but university leaders are keen not to overpromise. Soaring infection rates aside, many staff believe digital initiatives adopted in a state of emergency should be kept as they enhance the student experience.

Large lectures in cavernous theatres will be cut back, as will the traditional three-hour exam. Vice-chancellors say the shift to online assessments has been a positive of the pandemic experience, with universities such as Cambridge and Warwick already announcing their intention to stick with them.



The Learning Hub at the new Waterside campus at University of Northampton. Many institutions are now prioritising investment in a digital estates rather than physical facilities. Photograph: John Robertson/The Guardian

In the long term, many in the sector predict a shift in investment away from shiny and expensive new campuses to the digital estate. Sceptics see it as a way of cutting costs before a further funding squeeze, while universities insist it is not a cheap option.

The immediate challenge will be winning over students, who are craving human contact after spending months learning in their bedrooms. Despite being far more technologically advanced than their institutions, the overwhelming feedback is they want the full campus experience and plenty of face-to-face interaction – just as universities start to move online.

“Some universities are saying some things will be moved permanently online, and there are genuinely some students for whom that’s worked well,” said Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute thinktank. “But the difficulty for universities is that students are very keen for the face-to-face stuff to come back. You can only push technology so far. What really matters for students is human beings and having a sense of belonging. If it’s all online you just don’t get that.”



Adam Tickell, vice-chancellor at Sussex University, says there continues to be a strong clamour for face-to-face delivery of lectures. Photograph: Stuart Robinson/Sussex University

Adam Tickell, the vice-chancellor at Sussex University, said it was too soon to tell what permanent change the pandemic had brought. “My guess is we’re not suddenly going to get a new model overnight. Last March we had a very rapid transformation, and over the course of the last 15 months since the quality of online provision has improved as people have adapted to the technology.

“But there continues to be a very strong rationale for the kind of education we were offering before the pandemic. Obviously seminars and labs are much better when there is a small group of people interacting. But even for lectures, when you are lecturing, every lecture is interactive – you know when you are giving a terrible lecture or a good one because the body language is there, you feed off the students and they feed off you.”

Sheffield Hallam’s vice-chancellor, Chris Husbands, has banned the common phrase “blended learning” from senior leadership discussions to describe a hybrid online and in-person teaching programme . He says the term is “a completely useless way to describe what’s happening” and that universities need a “new language” to describe the future learning experience.

“As long as you say lectures are online, it perpetuates the notion that the entire student experience is online. When students say they want lectures, it’s not that they want to have lectures, they want to go for coffee with their mates after it and talk about it. They want to engage. So what you really need to do is say, how do you most effectively use your campus to stimulate engagement? ” Lectures are in any case “pretty ineffective” for teaching, he added.

“I’ve got some letters from students saying ‘I don’t want to come back on campus’, and I’ve got some letters saying ‘I want to come back a lot’. And the bit I think we are struggling with at the moment is: where can we give choice?”



The Forge student accommodation at Sheffield Hallam University saw a rise in Covid cases among its students, but some still want to return to campus.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Husbands acknowledged that value for money would be a key concern for students who have felt short-changed by the lack of in-person teaching. “We’ve had more students raising it with us this year than ever before. I think that there has been a shift in perception, and that’s not going to go away.”

By the time the pandemic hit last year, Northampton University had already embedded a new way of teaching called “active blended learning”, combining online teaching materials with face-to-face education.

“A lot of universities are now only catching up with where we were three or four years ago,” said Northampton’s vice-chancellor, Nick Petford. “Universities and students have got used to the idea of more of a blended online learning approach. Personally I think that’s a good thing. So I would imagine that there’s going to be much more emphasis placed on this in all universities going forward.



Nick Petford, vice-chancellor Northampton University, says ‘universities and students have got used to the idea of more of a blended online learning approach’. Photograph: Northampton University

“What we are experimenting with now are things like virtual reality and augmented reality for students, particularly in healthcare and nursing. We were going down this route anyway, but Covid has been a big catalyst.”

Petford also predicts the shift online will open up opportunities in the international student market. Instead of having to travel halfway around the world to a UK university, they will be able to study from their home countries, making it a cheaper, more accessible option to more young people. He also foresees a more aggressive market developing from private providers who can charge a cheaper price for a hybrid digital and physical course, leading to increased competition among traditional bricks and mortar universities.

While some universities look ahead to bright, digital futures, others foresee a slow evolution rather than revolution. “I’m not a great believer that there’s going to be some kind of mass revolution in the way universities operate,” said Sir David Bell, the vice-chancellor at Sunderland University. “Partly because we have a tried and tested approach and generally students like it.”

Mary Curnock Cook, a university admissions expert who is chairing an independent commission on students, said there were nerves about freshers' events in September and fears about "uncorking" social contact among students deprived of it for so long, but socialisation was a vital part of the learning and university experience. On assessments, she predicted "more open book exams, take home exams and projects that students do over a 24-hour period. Universities are realising these can be much more realistic ways of students demonstrating their knowledge and their ability to apply their knowledge."

Not every university will want to speed ahead with change. "It will be interesting to see how many universities capitalise and amplify the benefits that have been gained from having to work online, and those that find it easier to revert back to pre-Covid practices," said Curnock Cook. "I really worry that some universities will be heaving a huge sigh of relief and thinking, we can go back to the way we were."

'I'd love to have in-person lectures'

Rhian Shillabeer has just finished her second year as an undergraduate at the University of Kent. While she understands why campuses were closed during the pandemic, she's unhappy that some restrictions will remain into her third and final year.

"I would love to have in-person lectures, but a lot of universities, including Kent now, are saying that some things will be online for the first term at least. They've said it might be a blended approach. Politics, my department, is massive, it's one of the biggest at Kent. For bigger departments like mine there will be online lectures because it's apparently not safe to have 300 people in a lecture hall, but we can have 30,000 people at Wimbledon. I'm not happy with that at all," Shillabeer said.



University of Kent student, Rhian Shillabeer, said her second year experience had been ‘pretty rubbish’ with no in-person teaching.
Photograph: Tim Stubbings

Shillabeer’s second year as a student has been “pretty rubbish”, with no in-person teaching or use of university facilities, while working from home with four others in a “claustrophobic” shared house.

The coming year promises to be better, with in-person seminars and a normal social life promised, despite lectures remaining online. “But if all restrictions are set to end in the middle of July, and I go back in the last week of September, it doesn’t sit right with me that the government can get rid of all restrictions but my university will still have them,” she said.

“To make students pay nearly £10,000 for something universities have a choice whether or not to implement, it’s not fair. I’m not happy to pay that much. In my first year I was happy to pay that much because I was getting everything that was promised to me. But I’m not getting everything that was promised to me this year, even though it could be.”

Shillabeer wrote a letter of protest that gained nearly 300 signatures from her fellow students. “I sent that to the vice-chancellor and high-up people, and I

got a response that swept it under the rug. It was: yes we get how you are feeling, bye. There wasn't any invitation to speak more about it," she said.

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From masks to self-isolation: which Covid rules will change in England on 19 July?

Ministers have confirmed plans to remove most Covid rules, but masks will be ‘expected’ in certain areas

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Mask-wearing and social distancing will be left to people's personal responsibility when restrictions lift. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Mask-wearing and social distancing will be left to people's personal responsibility when restrictions lift. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Peter Walker](#) Political correspondent

[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 12 Jul 2021 10.50 EDT

What has been announced today?

Ministers have confirmed the widely expected [plan to go ahead](#) with the final stage of Covid unlocking in England from 19 July. This will involve the end of more or less every domestic legal restriction. All businesses will be able to open, without Covid-related capacity limits, and mitigation measures such as mask-wearing and social distancing will be left to people's personal responsibility. There are, however, some changes in approach over the past week when it comes to voluntary measures.

What mandatory restrictions will stay in force?

Just a handful. This includes the need to self-isolate if you test positive for coronavirus, or if you have been in close contact with someone who does, although the latter will end from 16 August for under-18s and those who have received a second Covid vaccination at least 10 days before the contact. Border restrictions will also stay in place, depending on the status of the country from which people have travelled.

Has anything changed over masks?

While the rules on masks are the same as announced by Boris Johnson a week ago – it is entirely voluntary – the language has been [considerably toughened up](#), with ministers saying people will be “expected” to cover their faces in crowded indoor areas such as public transport and shops. However, while rail and transit operators can make mask use a condition of carriage, officials say there is no basis in law for shop owners, even those who are clinically vulnerable, to bar the maskless. There are not even any rules in place for pharmacies, where staff sometimes carry out face-to-face consultations and examinations.

What about returning to workplaces?

Again, while all obligation for home working will end, the Downing Street view is that the government will “expect and recommend” a gradual return to offices, with many of those who are able to work from home still doing so over the summer. In the next few days, there will be six pieces of workplace guidance for the next stage of unlocking, for various sectors of the economy. But as with shop staff, employees who are clinically vulnerable or have a compromised immune system will have no right to demand home working, even if their workplace is not socially distanced and colleagues do not wear masks. They are still being encouraged to liaise with their employers.

Any guidance for mass events, nightclubs and the like?

Yes – and this is a definite change from a week ago. What are called “larger” events, and those where numerous people will mix indoors at close quarters, are being encouraged to introduce certification measures, also known as Covid passports. This would mean patrons having to prove a second vaccination at least 10 days before, or a recent negative Covid or positive antibody test. Officials are somewhat vague about what sort of events will be expected to do this, but as well as nightclubs and festivals, it could also cover football matches and even pubs or bars.

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What is to stop businesses just ignoring certification?

Nothing. Officials concede that if a nightclub decided to pack in any number of customers up to the fire limit seven days a week, without checking a single Covid app, then from 19 July it could do it. Certification will be “encouraged”, with work done alongside industry bodies. Government documents said that ministers will “consider mandating” the NHS Covid Pass if “sufficient measures are not taken to limit infection”.

But with only a week’s notice, and the extra staffing and time costs of checking every customer, it remains to be seen how widespread takeup will be.

What formal updates to guidance can we expect?

A few. On Monday, a series of Sage and Spi-M papers from last week will be released, as well as a fairly short document formally setting out what is changing, and what measures are staying in place. On Monday or Tuesday, there will be guidance for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable, though this is likely to be limited to fairly basic advice such as meeting people outdoors, checking if people you are meeting are vaccinated, and asking your GP if in doubt. Finally, in the next few days will come six sector-specific pieces of advice on returning to work.

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India's Covid vaccine rollout hit by hesitancy and supply snags

Pledge to inoculate entire population by December in doubt as states report shortages of vaccine stocks

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A health worker prepares to administer a Covid vaccine to a woman at a government hospital in Noida, a suburb of Delhi, on Monday. Photograph: Altaf Qadri/AP

A health worker prepares to administer a Covid vaccine to a woman at a government hospital in Noida, a suburb of Delhi, on Monday. Photograph: Altaf Qadri/AP

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Delhi](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 03.28 EDT

India's Covid vaccination rollout has continued to falter due to supply shortages and vaccine hesitancy, casting doubt on the government's pledge to vaccinate the entire population by December.

A number of states, including the capital, Delhi, said they had run out of vaccine stocks this week while others including Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra said vaccine supplies were running critically low in many areas, particularly for those aged between 18 and 45.

Manish Sisodia, the deputy chief minister of Delhi, tweeted that “vaccines have run out in Delhi again. The central government gives vaccines for a day or two, then we have to keep the vaccine centres closed for several days.”

The central government has disputed the claims of shortages and said all states were informed weeks in advance how many vaccines would be sent to them each month.

Vaccinating India, the second most populous country in the world with more than 1.3 billion citizens, is a gargantuan task. However, nationwide figures show that the country is nowhere near hitting the daily target needed to have the whole adult population vaccinated by the end of 2021, as was promised in May by a government minister, Prakash Javadekar.

Only 5% of the population is fully vaccinated, while about 20% have had one dose.

[India coronavirus cases](#)

More than 8 million people need to be vaccinated each day to hit the target of 2.16bn doses administered by December, but on Sunday the turnout fell to 1.3 million, the lowest in months, and the daily average so far for July has been about 4 million.

Fears of a third Covid wave hitting India in the next few months have added an urgency to the vaccination programme. While cases remain extremely low in the capital Delhi, one of the worst hit areas in the devastating second

wave, there are still officially about 1,000 Covid deaths per day in India, with the real figure likely to be far higher. The central government has said it is monitoring an alarming rise in cases in states in the north-east and in Kerala in the south.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) warned on Monday that “the third wave is inevitable and imminent” and urged the government to limit tourist travel and religious activities and pilgrimages, which have picked up again in recent weeks.

“It is painful to note that in this crucial time, when everyone needs to work for the mitigation of the third wave, in many parts of the country, both governments and the public are complacent and engaged in mass gatherings without following Covid protocols,” said the IMA in a statement.

Vaccine hesitancy has also been hindering the vaccine rollout, particularly in rural areas. In the impoverished state of Bihar, where vaccine hesitancy is rife owing to misinformation campaigns on social media and WhatsApp and fears vaccines will cause infertility or death, there have been reports of attacks on mobile vaccination centres. Local authorities have been offering villagers home appliances such as fridges and fans and even gold coins as incentives to boost the vaccination turnout.

Yet hesitancy is also present among the educated elite, including doctors, some of whom are concerned in particular by the domestically produced vaccine Covaxin, which still does not have World [Health](#) Organization approval.

The prime minister, Narendra Modi, has personally appealed to Indians to get vaccinated on his monthly radio show, and speaking at an event on Monday, the home minister, Amit Shah, also addressed the issue of vaccine hesitancy.

“No one should be under the impression that our fight is over – the only way to win this battle is 100% vaccination of the masses,” said Shah. “However, some communities are still hesitant in taking vaccines. People are not coming forward out of fear that the vaccine will adversely affect them.”

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Bondi

Two apartment blocks in hard lockdown in Sydney and Melbourne to contain Covid outbreak

Residents in Bondi Junction under police guard after eight cases in block, while residents in Maribyrnong building ordered to isolate after an infected removalist worked there

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Sydney police patrol outside a Bondi Junction apartment block. The building has been locked down under armed guard after eight residents across five

different units tested positive to Covid-19. An apartment building in Melbourne's Maribyrnong is also in lockdown. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Sydney police patrol outside a Bondi Junction apartment block. The building has been locked down under armed guard after eight residents across five different units tested positive to Covid-19. An apartment building in Melbourne's Maribyrnong is also in lockdown. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Calla Wahlquist

@callapilla

Mon 12 Jul 2021 19.46 EDT

Concerns about the spread of the Delta variant in apartment buildings has prompted a hard lockdown of two residential complexes in Sydney and [Melbourne](#).

An apartment building in Bondi Junction in Sydney's east remains under police guard after eight cases of Covid were detected across five of the 29 apartments, while residents of an apartment building in Maribyrnong in Melbourne's north-western suburbs have been ordered to isolate after a removalist with Covid worked there last week.

The [New South Wales](#) government has made face masks mandatory in the shared spaces of apartment buildings in response to the outbreak, including for residents, visitors, delivery drivers and cleaners.

[Covid Australia live update: Victoria records three new cases as Melbourne apartment block in lockdown; financial support for Sydney](#)

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The NSW chief health officer, Dr Kerry Chant, said people who live in apartment buildings should not be gathering in common areas, even citing putting the rubbish out as a risk.

“This is a reminder of the risk that Covid poses and why we were requiring masks ... in indoor common property areas of residential premises and also

discourage social gatherings or any gatherings across household groups in those apartment buildings as well,” she said.

Residents of an apartment building in Maribyrnong were delivered a letter on Tuesday ordering them to go into isolation for 14 days, after a Covid-positive removalist worked at the address on 8 July.

Residents of the 78-unit Ariele apartment in Thomas Holmes Street, Maribyrnong, woke to find the letter from local health district Western [Health](#) on their doorstep.

Letter given to residents of the apartment complex now listed as an exposure site. Quick response from [@western_health](#) - priority testing and info on in home testing. pic.twitter.com/SDBaiQFVUJ

— Sharnelle Vella (@SharnelleVella) [July 12, 2021](#)

It stated that everyone who had been at the apartment on 8 July has been identified as a tier one close contact, and must not leave their apartment for 14 days other than to get tested. This includes anyone who just visited or made a delivery, if they accessed the residential lobby, stairwells, lift, residential floors or carpark.

Residents who were not at the address on Tuesday but have been there at any point from Friday to Monday night are tier two contacts and have to isolate until they receive a negative test result.

The person who had direct contact with the removalist has tested negative. A dedicated testing lane was opened at the Melbourne showgrounds on Tuesday for the building’s 100 to 150 residents.

The decision to lock down the apartment follows the lockdown of a South Melbourne apartment last month, [after the virus was found to have transmitted between neighbours and through shared spaces](#).

The Sydney removalist went into two private homes in [Victoria](#) on 8 July before driving to South Australia and back to Sydney on 9 July. They were

identified as a close contact and tested positive on 10 July. One of their two co-workers has already tested positive, the other is in isolation.

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Health authorities said the contact tracing interviews with the removalists had “proved complex and challenging” and there may be more exposure sites to come.

Victoria recorded one new coronavirus case on Tuesday morning. They are understood to be a household contact of a family who moved to Melbourne from Sydney last week. Two members of the family had already tested positive.

Ariele apartment resident Sherille Scott said she did not read the letter until she saw news crews parked outside the building.

[Latest NSW Health Covid exposure sites: full list and map of Sydney hotspots and coronavirus case locations](#)

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“So I got up about quarter to six, saw a letter on my doorstop, didn’t think much of it, picked it up, stuffed it in my bag, got in my car and drove out, saw all the news crews – then read the letter and drove straight back,” she told ABC news.

Scott said the removalists were at the building for half a day on Thursday. She shared the lift with a load of furniture.

She said she was happy to lock down but concerned she did not have adequate supplies of medication.

Coles supermarket in Craigieburn Central, the Mobil Ballan petrol station on the Western Highway at Ballan, and McDonald’s on the freeway at Ballan have also been identified as tier one exposure sites, meaning anyone who visited them [at the listed time](#) must isolate for 14 days.

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It started on stageStage

Mrs Merton and the naughty nun: Caroline Aherne's first comedy gigs

She sometimes said she'd rather be a hairdresser but Aherne's cheeky early appearances in the pubs and clubs of Manchester led her to TV fame



Caroline Aherne as Sister Mary Immaculate. Photograph: Richard Davis

Caroline Aherne as Sister Mary Immaculate. Photograph: Richard Davis



Rachael Healy

Tue 13 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

In the early 90s, Manchester's cultural revolution was in full swing. "Everything was thriving," remembers actor, writer and comedian John Thomson who grew up in Preston before studying drama at Manchester Polytechnic. Beyond the Haçienda, a comedy scene was growing in the city's pub rooms where Thomson made friends with Wythenshawe local [Caroline Aherne](#). "In Manchester at that time, there were a lot of funny people," Thomson says. "Caroline was naturally funny."

Aherne's comic creation Mrs Merton, the elderly talk-show host treading the line between innocence and insult, had begun making appearances in the late 80s alongside Frank Sidebottom. Aherne was also performing as the Mitzi Goldberg Experience. "She used to wear this awful acrylic, curly wig, and she put on a southern drawl. It was Dolly Parton of sorts," Thomson recalls. "I think she had a guitar, but she couldn't play. There were probably no strings."

Mitzi was soon usurped by cheeky nun Sister Mary Immaculate. Aherne adopted an Irish accent (studied from her parents), full habit and Bible. Instead of verses, it was filled with jokes ("People say to me, 'Where does

the Bible stand on homosexuality?’ Three times in the Bible Jesus said: ‘Get thee behind me Satan.’”)



John Thomson, Caroline Aherne and Steve Coogan in *The Dead Good Show*. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

After meeting through Craig Cash, with whom she created the hit sitcom *The Royle Family*, Aherne and Thomson got to know each other performing at the Buzz Club in Chorlton. People queued around the block for the club, which was started by John Marshall, known as Agraman the Human Anagram. As host, Marshall offered “groan-worthy standup”, smashing out pun after pun. “It was a great place to cut your teeth if you fancied doing something a bit different,” says Thomson.

Thanks to Manchester-based Granada’s encouragement of local talent, Thomson and Aherne soon moved to TV with regional variety show *What’s New?* and sketch pilot [The Dead Good Show](#). Then, later, game show *Remote Control*, and sketch shows *The Full Monty* and *The Fast Show*. The pair also performed at universities. There’d be “horrible dressing rooms, stinking of fags, bog seat on the floor”, says Thomson. But they allowed Aherne to indulge a surprising habit: “Caroline always used to carry a massive handbag. We’d be talking about the gig, then she’d go ‘Look at

that', and she'd robbed something! She'd take things like a hammer or a sign for the ladies: 'I'll have that to put on my toilet door.'"

Aherne often had "an entourage of close female friends" to ward off the loneliness of gigging alone. She didn't always enjoy live performance. New material gigs at the Band on the Wall venue were tough – sometimes she'd profess her desire to become a hairdresser instead.



Aherne on Frank Sidebottom's Fantastic Shed Show in 1992. Photograph: ITV/Shutterstock

Occasionally, she'd do standup where "she'd just talk about life". Thomson remembers one anecdote about himself. The punchline? That he, a northern lad, steamed vegetables for his tea. To Aherne, this was hilarious. "Sometimes she'd do gags that didn't have a payoff – she left a big pause. Because it was Caroline, it worked. The checkout girl on The Fast Show and the teenage girl in the bedroom, they grew from that standup."

In 1992, Thomson and [Steve Coogan](#) won the Perrier award in Edinburgh. The following year, Thomson returned, this time with Aherne and Simon Day. It didn't go smoothly. Thomson had imagined a variety show, with the trio's established characters, music and sketches, but Aherne "couldn't be arsed" and they arrived with a less-than-polished show. Some nights she'd

cry and beg to cancel, Thomson says: “The show was called Do You Like Us? A simple one-word review: no!”



Caroline Aherne in 1997. Photograph: Eamonn McCabe/The Guardian

Nevertheless, there were quality sketches. In *Have a Dance*, Thomson was a Peter Dickson-style announcer. “Caroline’s stood stock-still in the middle of the room. I went: ‘This is Julie. Julie’s 52, lives alone, has one cat called Dave and one called Smokey. She loves nothing more than tucking into a box of Dairy Milk while watching Shirley Valentine. Julie! Feel free to have a dance!’” Music would kick in and Aherne suddenly started dancing. Bob Mortimer described it as “absolute class”.

There was also an early version of *The Fast Show*’s pretentious dance group Thrusk. The trio appeared as The Zeitgeist Theatre Company, wearing moon-shaped masks, dressed in black, attempting contemporary dance moves. “It got a massive laugh,” says Thomson.

In 1994, Dave Perkin opened the Frog and Bucket comedy club in Manchester. It began as a cosy 80-seater, which became Aherne’s “social club”, Perkin says: “She was enjoying the comedy and mentoring comedians like Dave Gorman and Lucy Porter. Caroline was always really supportive.” The *Mrs Merton* Show had become a TV show at Granada and Aherne’s

fame was growing. At the Frog, she'd be "networking with comedians, who then became part of the show".

She still performed on stage, too. Andy Wilkinson, aka Smug Roberts (famed for Phoenix Nights), put on a comic version of The Wizard of Oz in the mid-90s, "a pantomime in the middle of summer", Perkin says: "She played Dorothy and New Order were the backing band."

Aherne's stage characters led to her TV success. Thomson recently presented a BBC special looking back on Aherne's career nearly five years on from her untimely death: "It was only after that documentary that it really hit home how much I missed her."

While Caroline had "an absolute hatred for live work sometimes" and found fame difficult, she loved turning real life into laughs. "A lot of Caroline's comedy was based on things that happened to her and people she'd met along the way. That's why she was such a hit."

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Laver lover Jonathan Williams scouts the rocky shores at low tide
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Welsh caviar: should we all start eating laver?

Laver lover Jonathan Williams scouts the rocky shores at low tide
Photograph: Angeles Rodenas

Protein-rich seaweed has dropped off British menus. Now an innovative Pembrokeshire group is leading a renaissance rooted in Welsh history

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Tue 13 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

From the surfing beach of Freshwater West, Pembrokeshire, it is just a short walk to a small restored hut that stands alone on the southern cliff, where local forager, chef and entrepreneur Jonathan Williams gazes down at the rocks below.

“It’s part of the Welsh DNA, like rugby and male voice choirs,” says Williams. “It’s packed with flavour, it’s 40% protein, healthy, it doesn’t take up land or require fresh water and it grows at a phenomenal rate. We should be shouting about it.”

He's talking about seaweed. Despite the nearly 650 different species that grow on UK shores, seaweed is rarely thought of as a British food. Yet the red macroalgae *Porphyra*, commonly known as laver or nori, has been harvested for centuries in [Wales](#), and is rooted in Welsh history.



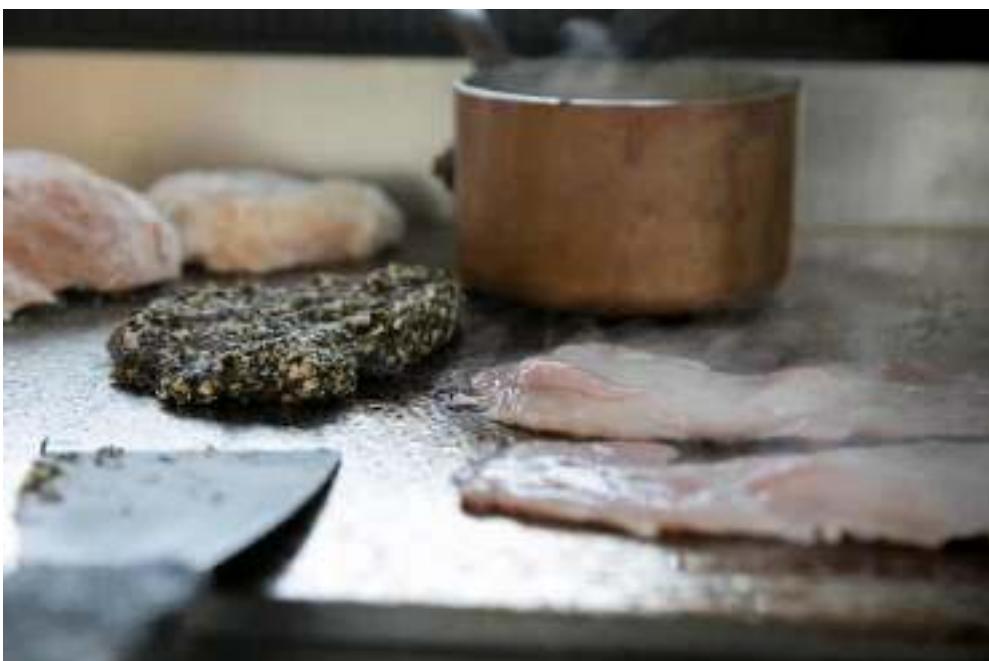
- The last remaining thatched hut from the once booming cottage industry stands alone on the Pembrokeshire coastal path overlooking the beach of Freshwater West

On this particular stretch of the coastal path, seaweed became a flourishing cottage industry towards the end of the 19th century, with family-owned huts dotting the grassy cliffs. Women from the village of Angle used them to dry the seaweed they harvested before selling it to be processed in Swansea. Laverbread, a dark green puree without a crumb of bread in it, was the traditional way of eating it. Actor Richard Burton called it “Welshman’s caviar”; fried with cockles and bacon, it was a nutritious breakfast for the pit workers until the decline of coal mining in the 1950s.



Moving nimbly across the rocks, Williams knows where to find his treasures. For the past 10 years he has been foraging seaweed exposed by the early morning tide, out of a determination to put laver back on the menu. When he started, a few companies did sell laverbread – such as the family-run Selwyn's Seafoods in the Gower Peninsula, which also developed crispy laver snacks – but “it was very hard” to get people to taste seaweed, he says.

Today, however, people make the journey to try it. From his mother’s kitchen, Williams has created a variety of street food dishes for his beach cafe, and a range of products for the Pembrokeshire Beachfood Company. He plans to open a gastropub and microbrewery in Angle next year.





- From top: Preparing the full Welsh breakfast – bacon sizzles alongside a laverbread pattie. Williams’ mother, Athena, bakes laver ginger cake in her kitchen for his beach cafe. Customers await their orders at Jonathan Williams’ seaweed truck Café Môr in Freshwater West, Pembrokeshire

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Increasing awareness of the health and environmental benefits of seaweed, coupled with its potential implications for food security, has raised demand. Scientist Jessica Knoop researched the sustainability of *Porphyra* in the UK in collaboration with Williams and concluded that local harvesting wasn’t having a negative impact on wild stocks, but argues that the future of seaweed in Europe is aquaculture. “Cultivation of laver is definitely possible,” she says, although “more research is needed” to make it commercially viable.

The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates the global seaweed industry is valued at [around \\$6bn](#) (£4bn), destined mainly for human consumption in Asia Pacific, although other uses include cosmetics, feed, bioplastic, fertilisers and biofuel.



- View from the coastal path of one of the trial polyculture farms off the coast of St David's

Its presence in the western world is much less prominent and more artisanal. Take a one unique project in Wales, off the coast of St David's, which is finally making headway. It took [Câr-Y-Môr](#) (For the Love of the Sea) three years to get licences but since August two community-run trial farms are growing kelp, scallops and oysters, while being monitored for biodiversity and carbon capture. The 400 metres of seaweed lines replicate the 3D ocean farming model: vertical underwater gardens that can regenerate marine ecosystems. If successful, the project will be scaled up and provide a template for small producers in the area.



- Growing kelp seen from the surface at Câr-y-Môr's farm in the Ramsey Sound, Pembrokeshire

Born out of a conversation between Williams and disillusioned fish farmer Owen Haines, the initiative puts as much emphasis on environmental goals as socioeconomic needs. Haines, who moved from trout to shellfish farming before switching to polyculture farming, says: “The aim is to mitigate climate change, generate local jobs and improve people’s diets.” He mentions engagement as key to reassuring those unconvinced that farming sustainably won’t hinder other activities or alter the marine environment. With more than 100 members, they recently raised £84,000 with a “pioneer share offer” to continue operating.

The aim is to mitigate climate change, generate local jobs and improve people’s diets

Owen Haines, Câr-y-Môr



- Rosie Rees works at the seafood processing centre and volunteers at the seaweed farm, where she enjoys sharing her knowledge with new volunteers.

At 7am volunteers marine engineer and skipper Steve Rees, his daughter Rosie, agricultural farmer and educator Dan Jones and fishing trips provider Padrig Rees join Haines at St Justinian's to harvest sugar kelp (*Saccharina latissima*). Later on, diver and underwater pilot Martin Charlton helps with setting up the mussel farm. Between tasks, Padrig sums up the general sentiment: "It is about continuing to make a living from the sea without exhausting its resources."

The team effort is rewarded with a 400kg crop, although once dried it will lose 90% of its biomass. The yield is transported to Aberystwyth and test-dried in a state-of-the-art grain dryer but it doesn't prove suitable, frustrating plans to send out samples to local restaurants.



- Founding member of Câr-y-Môr Owen Haines (right) and volunteer Padrig Rees share a joke as they approach land

While commercialisation might still be a way off, at Aberystwyth University marine biologist Nerea Sanchis is starting a genetic monitoring programme to assess patterns of diversity in species of kelp. And at the processing centre in Solva, Câr-y-Môr co-founder Megan Haines is learning a new trade while generating revenue from marketing local seafood until they can start selling the farms' harvests.

“We are at a turning point in this area, there is a real danger of skills disappearing. We are reapplying them in a way that cares for the sea,” she says. “I’m really passionate about helping people to introduce seaweed into their diets.”

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New balance: will work be more parent-friendly than ever after the pandemic?



‘Working parents seem to be vacillating between extreme optimism and dire pessimism.’ Illustration: Steven Gregor

‘Working parents seem to be vacillating between extreme optimism and dire pessimism.’ Illustration: Steven Gregor

Between home schooling and hybrid working, the last year has brought rapid and radical shifts in our working habits, good and bad. Now it is time to see whether positive change can stick



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Last month, [a video by Maggie Mundwiller](#), a mother in St Louis, Missouri, went viral on TikTok. It showed her one-year-old son accompanying her to a second face-to-face job interview. (She had asked for an alternative date because she had no childcare. The employer said: “Bring him with you.”) The video featured on Good Morning America, has had more than 9m views and has inspired endless admiring comments, including: “It makes me sooo happy to know there are companies like this”; “Glad it’s a toddler-friendly business!” and: “Take note, corporate America.”

The story is cute, as is the kid, who wore a bow tie and took along his own CV (“Skills: destroying a clean space in three seconds”). And, yes, the pandemic has given many of us permission to adopt work habits that previously weren’t encouraged. But will this kind of thing happen again in post-Covid life? What have we learned about incorporating family life into working life? And is anybody going to implement those lessons?

Behind last year’s conflicting headlines about [“women returning to the 1950s”](#) and [“kids spending more time with dads than ever in history”](#), the

picture is extremely unclear. Working parents seem to be vacillating between extreme optimism (“I can take my child to a job interview!”) and dire pessimism (“We will have to work even longer office hours to catch up!”). According to a [study by the charity Working Families](#), published in the UK last month, 50% of parents “are concerned that a return to less flexible working, as restrictions are lifted, will have a negative effect on their family life”, while 32% have no such worries.

The start of the summer holidays are already a big challenge. In England, [640,000 children](#) (of a school population of 8.9 million) are currently isolating at home. “With school and childcare bubbles bursting, parents have suddenly had to stop working and start home schooling again,” says Joeli Brearley, founder of the campaigning organisation Pregnant Then Screwed. “Due to late notice about whether restrictions would be relaxed, there are fewer holiday clubs for kids. And the day employees can be told to return to the office seems to coincide almost perfectly with the start of the summer holidays, adding enormous pressure and creating impossible challenges for many.”

The impact of the pandemic on working parents is complicated and unpredictable, Brearley says. “There appears to be huge polarisation in the way employers have reacted to Covid-19. On one side, we have been inundated with requests from employers to support them in making their workplace the best it can be for working parents. Covid-19 has forced many companies to recognise that their employees are people with real lives and other responsibilities apart from their job. They now understand that if they don’t enable their employees to effectively manage both their professional and their personal responsibilities, their workforce will have poor mental health and they will be less productive. However, on the flip side, our advice lines have never been busier and we have seen a huge uptick in discrimination towards pregnant women and mothers due to their caring responsibilities. And we have also seen a deterioration in employers granting flexible working requests, other than home working.”

Typical of the hundreds of women who have contacted Pregnant Then Screwed is Sarah, an admin worker with a two-year-old daughter. After six years working with a company and moving from part-time to a more senior full-time role, the end of her maternity leave coincided with the start of the

first lockdown in March 2020. “Initially I was furloughed. Then in September I was called in and told: ‘Because of coronavirus we’re going to have to make you redundant.’ I just knew that it was because I’d had a baby and they’d managed without me and wanted to save money. Covid definitely made it easier because they could use it as an excuse. It was a bitter pill to swallow as, for a long time, I was made to feel valuable and appreciated. With Covid, it switched overnight.”

It’s a similar story for Becca, mother to a one-year-old, who has so far retained her four-day-a-week managerial job with a charity – but feels “on the sidelines, with no progress, no role and nothing to do”. She says: “I think Covid has been used as an excuse to not put the time and thought into my return to work. It was all: ‘You’ve come back in the middle of a pandemic ... It makes things really difficult.’ The person who did my maternity cover has stayed on in my job. And I have been denied a promotion which I had been working for before I got pregnant. If Covid hadn’t hit, I think it would have been sorted out. But it has been an excuse to do nothing. I’m sure they were hoping I would just quit.”

Both Sarah and Becca wish they had taken more written notes of things that were said to them at certain times (“Are you planning to have more children?” “What have you gone and got pregnant for?”), which could have helped to build a case, Covid or not. And they wish they had sought advice and support sooner. But they both agree they have been unlucky with their employers and that their experience is not mirrored by families around them. This is where the unpredictability comes in.



Illustration: Steven Gregor

Michelle Tucker runs the Wellbeing Supervisor, a Surrey-based company that specialises in absentee management and the mental health of working parents. She has been hosting a series of pandemic workshops for parents. Most of them rave about this time: “Two to three hours a day less travel. Money saved on travel. Household chores completed during breaks. More one-to-one time with children.” Parents have felt a lot less stressed, she says. “Their anxiety is reduced because they are on time for meetings where they used to be rushing and feeling they could never quite please everyone. People report getting more work tasks completed at home in less time – so a win-win for parents and organisations.” The one major stressor, however, was home schooling, with parents with young children feeling “trapped and helpless”.

There does seem to be an important divide between lockdown and what is happening now. In her book *The Authority Gap*, Mary Ann Sieghart examines the “systematic undermining” of women, which, she says, worsened during the first lockdown. “Suddenly, many women were expected to produce three meals a day, as well as bear most of the burden of home schooling. While male partners were often working from home almost undisturbed, women were doing the vast majority of the unpaid work. [A Guardian poll](#) found 70% of mothers did all or most of the home schooling,

73% did all or most of the laundry and more than 60% did all or most of the life admin, food shopping, cleaning, tidying up, childcare and cooking. What did the men do? Took the bins out.”

That picture may since have changed. [A survey of more than 2,000 respondents](#) by the Fatherhood Institute in May 2021 found that four out of five fathers were spending more time with their children than before the pandemic. The report states that “68% spent more time on home schooling or helping with homework; 59% spent more time on cleaning, laundry and cooking”. More than two-thirds reported “a better father-child relationship following lockdown”, though we must bear in mind that this is men and women reporting on themselves, and we all overestimate how much we do. Nonetheless, how do we preserve the gains and make working parenthood easier for everyone?

“From my conversations,” says Sieghart, “it seems that most employers will settle for a hybrid model, in which employees who can work from home will be allowed to do so several days a week. What’s crucial for women, though, is that men take up this opportunity, too. If it’s men who are mainly in the office and women who are mainly working from home, guess what? The men will be promoted and the women, less so.”

Gill Whitty-Collins, a former senior vice-president at consumer goods giant Procter & Gamble and the author of Why Men Win At Work, reels off an alarming array of recent statistics. Women’s job losses during the pandemic have already been 1.8 times greater than men’s, according to [a recent McKinsey report](#). One in four women are considering downsizing or giving up on their career altogether, according to [LeanIn and McKinsey](#). In the US, women are 24% more likely to lose their job, says the nonprofit [Catalyst](#), while men have been promoted [three times more than women this year](#) and twice as many men as women have received pay rises. Whitty-Collins adds: “It is clear that the pipeline of talented women has taken a big hit from the pandemic and we will see the consequences of this for years to come. Only 7% of CEOs were women before Covid. We can expect that percentage to drop further.” This does not feel like a world where you can breeze into a job interview with a baby in a bow tie.

Plus, there's no point in ignoring the obvious: many companies have lost money as a result of recent events. They may need extra reassurance about how experimental they can afford to be. And this new flexibility may simply not be in their DNA. Goldman Sachs's CEO, David Solomon, said this year that remote work was "an aberration that we're going to correct as soon as possible". (You have to admire his candour.) But elsewhere the move to remote has already happened: [a recent survey of charity leaders](#) by the insurer Ecclesiastical found that almost one-third would not return to their offices. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People put its office up for sale in January and is consulting with staff over permanent remote working. Nationwide and Barclays have both announced their intention to move to a hybrid model.



Illustration: Steven Gregor

"My sense from a social-sector point of view is that there isn't going to be a return to any 'normal'," says Sue Tibballs, the chief executive of the Sheila McKechnie Foundation, which supports thousands of charity campaigners across the UK. "Covid has blurred the boundaries of home and work – something women were already more used to. And it has accelerated the demand for flexibility, which, again, was often something women asked for. But without an underlying change in working hours or the balance of parental responsibility, I'm not sure what this amounts to." She summarises

the uncertainty: “It feels like there’s a lot of pressure for a renegotiation of working patterns and workplaces – and of our identity as workers and parents. But I’m not sure I’m hearing much about where all this is pointing to.”

It is pointing to a big question mark. And to a chronic unwillingness to say what “hybrid working” means. Does it mean you can work from home when you want? Or only when your boss says you can? Can they force you to be somewhere you don’t want to be? There is little agreement on what “best practice” might look like. But open consultation, dialogue and experimentation are clearly key. This is unlikely to be a situation where you set a new system in place and it works for everyone immediately. For some, it will be an opportunity to re-evaluate everything.

Sophie Walker, the founding leader of the Women’s Equality party and a co-founder of the intersectional feminist movement Activate, claims there’s an opportunity for radical change here. “There’s a need for a movement to rebel against the standard, white-male, capitalist framing of the only work that matters being the kind you do in an office – and break from only to buy sandwiches and sushi from corporate chains.”

Walker adds that the pandemic has only served to exaggerate “them and us” divisions. “There are lots of people who can afford it who will opt out and go for portfolio careers, having moved to the countryside and having enjoyed home working. ‘Top talent’ will have to be wooed. Meanwhile, the lives of those in precarious work – on part-time or with zero-hours contracts – will continue in just the same kind of awful fragility.”

Whitty-Collins puts it this way: “The pandemic has taught people, of all genders, how they want to work and live. I don’t think they are going to want to go back to the old way of being in the office all day every day. Employees with remote- and hybrid-work options are more innovative, more engaged, more committed and less likely to leave. Offering flexible work in job ads has been shown to increase applications by 30%. Smart employers know this. They will be the ones who keep and attract employees, while the ‘dinosaur’ companies who value and insist on presenteeism will lose out as people vote with their feet and find themselves another job where what matters is the work, not who is visible in the office.”

The fortunes of working parents will be largely dependent on the industry they work in and the position they occupy in the hierarchy. So if you feel as if you have some agency in your professional life, you will probably be OK. Otherwise ... good luck. And maybe don't start writing a cute CV for your baby just yet.

Some names have been changed

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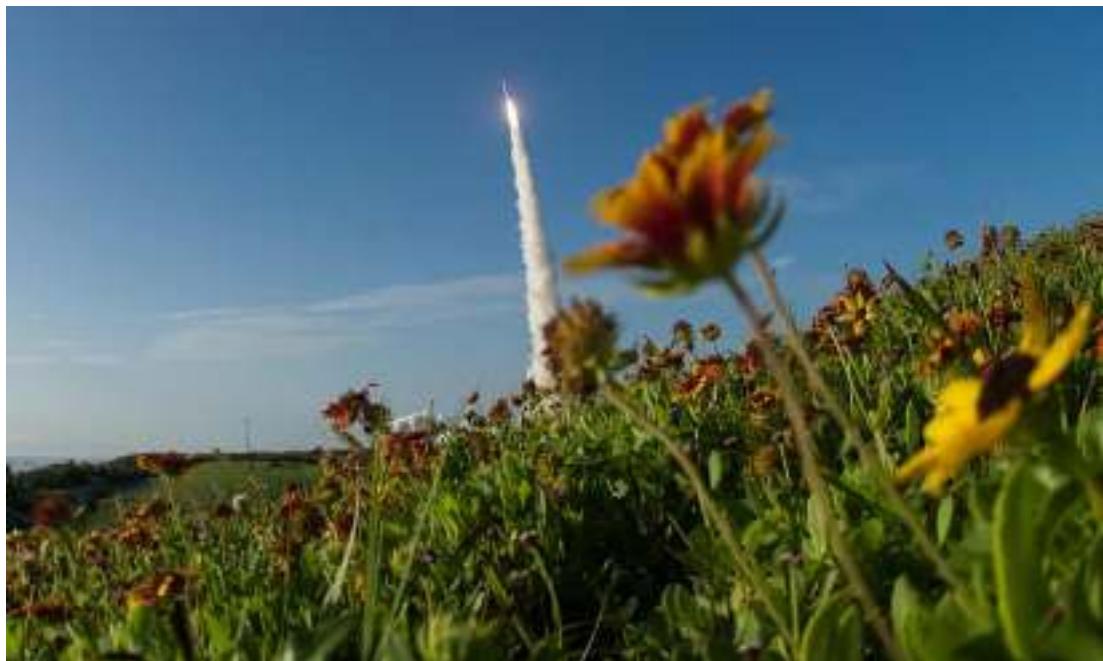
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A rocket carrying Nasa's Perseverance rover to Mars launches from Florida in July 2020. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

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Safe space: the cosmic importance of planetary quarantine

A rocket carrying Nasa's Perseverance rover to Mars launches from Florida in July 2020. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

As the pace and ambition of space exploration accelerates, preventing Earth-born organisms from hitching a ride has become more urgent than ever

by [Geoff Manaugh](#) and [Nicola Twilley](#)

Tue 13 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

“This, what you’re doing today, never happens,” Nasa’s David Seidel told us. “This is a rare chance,” agreed the director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Michael Watkins, welcoming us into the lab’s spacecraft assembly facility, located in the hills outside Pasadena, California. The exceedingly unusual adventure awaiting us was a trip into the clean room where Perseverance, Nasa’s latest [Mars](#) rover, having been assembled under conditions of exacting sterility, sat awaiting shipment to Cape Canaveral.

Our visit, in December 2019, had been prefaced by a long email laying out extremely detailed rules: we were instructed not to wear any perfume, cologne, makeup or dangly earrings; flannel, wool or frayed clothing was not allowed; even our fingernails had to be smooth, rather than jagged. After a quick welcome, our phones and notebooks were confiscated, and a hi-tech doormat vacuum-brushed the soles of our shoes. In the gowning room, we were issued with face wipes, a sterile full-body “bunny suit”, plastic overshoes, hood, gloves and face mask, then offered a mirror in which to admire the final look. Finally, we were sent through the air shower – an elevator-sized chamber studded with nozzles that blasted us with pressurised air from all sides, in order to dust off any final stray particles – before stepping out into a white-floored, white-walled room filled with white-suited engineers.

The rover itself – a white go-kart the size of an SUV – was cordoned off behind red stanchions. The obsessive attention to cleanliness required in order to enter the rover’s presence was, in part, to protect the machine’s sensitive optical equipment and electronics: volatile chemicals, loose fibres or even flakes of human skin could damage its delicate circuitry or settle on one of its 23 camera lenses. But the primary purpose was planetary

quarantine: preventing the importation of Earth life to Mars. “I don’t know that we can say it’s the most sterile object that humans have ever created,” said one engineer. “But it’s extremely clean.”

It is a condition of space exploration that we cannot search for life on alien planets without bringing along very small amounts of very small Earth life. This process is known as forward contamination, and minimising it, if not preventing altogether, is the ultimate responsibility of Nasa’s planetary protection officer – “the second-best job title at Nasa,” according to Cassie Conley, who held it from 2006 until 2018. (The best job title, Conley told us, was director of the universe, but that position was sadly eliminated in an [institutional](#) reorganisation.)

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The practice of planetary quarantine dates back to the 1950s, when it became clear that rocket technology was shortly going to put outer space within human reach for the first time. In an ideal universe, the robotic spacecraft that we send to explore the cosmos would be sterile. (Humans are, by definition, contaminants.) In reality, for technical and economic reasons, they are not. But the consequences of transferring biological material between celestial bodies are a fractal example of unknown unknowns: we don’t know what forms of Earth life might survive a space journey, which of them might then flourish in whatever extraterrestrial conditions await them, and whether life even exists elsewhere in the solar system, let alone how it might be harmed by Earth life – or vice versa.

Faced with such extreme uncertainty, but unwilling to stay at home, spacefarers, like so many before them, have turned to quarantine as the buffer that will allow them to explore space without endangering Earth or inadvertently polluting the cosmos. Quarantine as a practice – a period of time, traditionally 40 days, in which a suspicious person or object is watched for signs of disease until proven safe – was formalised and named during the Black Death in the 14th century. Its rationale, and its implications, have become familiar to generations of humans during outbreaks over the subsequent centuries, most recently during the Covid-19 pandemic. On a daily basis, the complex calculus of quarantine is used to balance freedom of

movement and risk in the global commodities trade – in cattle, for example, or citrus, or cacao plants. In a cosmic context, however, where the potential threat is almost entirely speculative but the stakes are existential, what role should quarantine play?

The person in charge of protecting “all the planets, all the time” – as international planetary protection policy puts it – works out of a small office inside Nasa’s headquarters, a squat, undistinguished building in Washington DC. Just a couple of blocks north, in between the US Botanic Garden and the Air and Space Museum, lies a fairly recent addition to the Mall: the National Museum of the American Indian. It was established in response to the revelation that the National Museum of Natural History [held the skeletons](#) of nearly 20,000 Native Americans in its collections. Those remains, collected by force as the spoils of colonisation, are a reminder of the much larger toll incurred when two long-separated biospheres came into contact: “The greatest destruction of lives in human history,” according to the geographer W George Lovell. The concept of planetary quarantine arose at least partially in response to the catastrophic impact of that initial encounter.

It is impossible to know how many people lived in the Americas in 1491, before European explorers made first contact, but historians estimate that nine out of every 10 people in the New World died in the century or so that followed – most from infectious diseases. Before the conquistadors had even set foot in the major cities of South and Central America, their microbes had travelled ahead of them, passed from body to body, causing mass deaths. Without any previous exposure to smallpox, measles, influenza, typhus or diphtheria, the indigenous people of the Americas had no immunity to these common Old World diseases – and no concept of quarantine, having never had much need for it.

In 1957, as the Soviets successfully launched Sputnik and the cold war militarisation of space began to ramp up, some scientists began to worry that the encounter between Earth organisms and any lifeforms that might exist elsewhere in the solar system might also result in mutually assured destruction. Even prior to Nasa’s founding in 1958, the Stanford microbiologist Joshua Lederberg had begun making the case for an

international agreement to prevent the contamination of extraterrestrial environments with Earth life, and vice versa. “We are in a better position than Columbus was to have our cake and eat it, too,” he wrote, arguing that planetary quarantine was essential to the “orderly, careful, and well-reasoned extension of the cosmic frontier”.



Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins speaking to their wives through the window of a mobile quarantine facility in July 1969. Photograph: Nasa/Nasa/Reuters

Lederberg seems to have been primarily motivated by concern for the scientific loss that would occur if Earth life wiped out alien life, rather than the ethical dimensions of such a tragedy. “The overgrowth of terrestrial bacteria on Mars would destroy an inestimably valuable opportunity of understanding our own living nature,” he argued.

Others felt humans had a moral responsibility to avoid causing harm elsewhere in the galaxy. CS Lewis, better known for chronicling the fantasy world of Narnia, also wrote a space-themed trilogy in which he despaired at the idea that a flawed and sinful humanity, “having now sufficiently corrupted the planet on which it arose”, would overcome “the vast astronomical distances which are God’s quarantine regulations” and “seed itself over a larger area”. In the science community, one of Lederberg’s

allies, the young astronomer [Carl Sagan](#), later wrote that if there was life on Mars, humans must leave the planet alone. “Mars then belongs to the Martians, even if they are microbes,” he declared.

Largely as a result of Lederberg and Sagan’s campaign, the International Council of Scientific Unions, a non-governmental organisation dedicated to international cooperation in the advancement of science, formed Cospar, the Committee on [Space](#) Research, which still sets the ground rules for extraterrestrial exploration.

Cassie Conley, the former planetary protection officer, who often wears her hair in a long braid, is personally more aligned with Lewis. “I don’t particularly like humans,” she told us, as we sat in her office, the light outside fading. “I think we screwed up this planet well enough that we don’t deserve another one – but that’s just my personal bias and I’m very careful not to bring it into my job.”

Conley got that job when some of the tiny worms she had sent into orbit aboard the space shuttle Columbia in 2003, in order to study muscle atrophy in microgravity, were found to have survived the shuttle’s disastrous explosion. Her experiment provided an inadvertent demonstration that multicellular life might be able to survive a meteorite impact – and thus potentially spread between planets on meteors – and it caught the eye of then planetary protection officer John Rummel.

Rummel invited Conley to Washington on a year’s placement, and then, as he gradually eased his way toward the exit, left her to inherit the role. As a scientist, Conley is deeply curious about what we might find elsewhere in the universe. “I’m very interested in understanding the evolution of life,” she told us. But she is more invested in ensuring that we don’t do something that precludes the possibility of answering those questions before we even have the ability to ask them. “The best way to prevent forward contamination is simple: don’t go there,” she said. “But we’ve already decided we want to go there, so it’s a case of: in the absence of information, don’t do something that might reduce your ability to get information in the future.”

Back in the 1960s, as the scientific community tried to decide what form planetary protection should take, Nasa engineers were faced with two irreconcilable demands: internally, management insisted that anything the agency sent into space must be utterly sterile, while, on national television, John F Kennedy promised that the US would put a man – and his trillions of accompanying bacteria – on the moon by the end of the decade. In the absence of any absolute certainties, Cospar dithered, eventually deciding that planetary quarantine would have to operate based on a complex algebra of acceptable risk, in which the probability that a viable microbe would be brought to a planet on a landing craft would be divided by a guesstimate of how likely it was to survive there, in order to arrive at a global contamination allowance that could be divided between each spacefaring nation.

To fill in the parameters in that formula, Nasa began looking at the bacterial kill rates of different sterilisation techniques used in the food-processing industry, as well as in the army's bioweapon laboratories at Fort Detrick in Maryland. Using a particularly hardy spore-forming bacteria as their model for a series of tests, Nasa scientists fumigated, irradiated and baked spacecraft components before smashing them to see how many bugs survived, lurking in cracks and in the threads of screws and bolts. They determined that it was possible to clean a spacecraft sufficiently well that only one in every 10,000 landings would transport a viable microorganism.



Engineers in Nasa's jet propulsion laboratory in Pasadena, California with the Perseverance rover in 2019. Photograph: Nasa/JPL-Caltech/AFP/Getty

The likelihood that Earth life could survive on a particular solar system body was even harder to pin down. Somewhat arbitrarily, Cospar recommended that, for planets of biological interest, the total acceptable risk be kept to no more than a one in 1,000 chance of seeding another planet with terrestrial life in the course of exploring it. In the end, “acceptable” simply meant a figure that was the best engineers could achieve without breaking the budgets of member states’ space agencies. The total risk – a 0.1% chance of contamination – was then divided up among the spacefaring nations, with the US, as one of just two spacefaring superpowers, receiving nearly half of the total allocation.

Once astronauts get involved, though, all bets are off. Cospar’s framework is intended to cover only the short window of time during which a planet remains uncontaminated (and thus alien) enough to be of “biological interest”. Originally, this period was set at an optimistic 20 years – in the heady days of the space race, scientists estimated that, for example, dozens of missions to Mars would take place during that time, allowing its indigenous biology to be thoroughly understood. It has since been extended.

By the mid-70s, as the Apollo programme drew to a close and as Viking 1 and Viking 2, the first Martian landers, sent back data that painted a picture of a much harsher, drier environment than many scientists had hoped for, it began to seem as if the rest of the solar system was lifeless – making the need for quarantine moot. Indeed, many at Nasa and other space agencies chafed under planetary protection protocols, whose implementation made missions more expensive and limited onboard experiments to those whose hardware could survive the rigours of decontamination.

Crafting the original Cospar standards for what measures would adequately protect an imagined form of life in an unknown landscape from an inadequately defined threat was little more than an exercise in speculative extrapolation. In the 90s, Nasa embarked on a series of research programmes designed to reduce this uncertainty. The better the data in their models of probable contamination, the more precisely tailored the level of protection could be. (In human terms, this is analogous to implementing quarantine based on data from robust testing and contact tracing, so that most normal life and economic activity can continue, as opposed to a complete, indiscriminate lockdown.)

In the past two decades, a series of missions has begun to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge of conditions in the solar system, sending back promising news of briny oceans on one of Jupiter's moons, [Europa](#), and abundant sources of molecular energy on [Enceladus](#), one of Saturn's satellites. A series of probes and rovers sent to Mars has returned [signs of liquid water](#) and seasonal [methane clouds](#). “Mars continues to surprise us,” Conley said. “This is a good problem to have.” Even the Earth’s moon seems more interesting than it used to, with recent observations confirming the [presence of water ice](#) at its poles and in the “cold traps” created by permanently shadowed regions.

Meanwhile, a lot of new research, much of it Nasa-funded, has redefined our understanding of the extraordinary capabilities of Earth microbes. In deep caves and deserts, thermal vents at the bottom of the sea, and even cans of irradiated ground meat, researchers have discovered microbes that can survive crushing pressure, blistering heat and caustic alkalinity, without sunlight, water or any of life’s typical thermodynamic levers. Many of these

so-called [extremophiles](#) seem well adapted to Martian conditions, particularly beneath that planet's surface.

To learn more, we visited the New Mexico home of the speleo-biologist (a researcher of cave-dwelling organisms) Penelope Boston, who, at the time of our visit in August 2012, was serving on Nasa's planetary protection advisory committee. Boston's first real caving experience, decades earlier, was in the nearby [Lechuguilla Cave](#), where she twisted her ankle, popped a rib, acquired an infection that swelled her eye shut, and discovered several novel organisms – microbes whose metabolism, life cycle and chemical proclivities rendered them almost unrecognisable as biology.

"I really think it's the subsurface of Mars where the greatest chance of extant life, or even preservation of extinct life, would be found," Boston told us as we sat on her couch, surrounded by space-themed art and memorabilia. The cave organisms that Boston has since spent much of her career studying exist on an entirely different timescale, she explained, reflecting an environment in which they have few or no predators but extremely limited sources of energy. "I think this is a long-term, evolutionary repository for living organisms," Boston said. On Mars, whose environment seems to oscillate between freezing aridity and something that is perhaps more clement, Boston speculates that subterranean life could lie dormant for millennia, reawakening only when conditions improve.



An image captured by Perseverance on Mars. Photograph: Nasa/JPL-Caltech/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Boston's work has led her to implement planetary protection protocols here on Earth, to avoid introducing surface life into the extreme depths that she explores. Nasa's current planetary protection officer, the bio-geochemist Lisa Pratt, who took over from Conley in 2018, has discovered the extraordinary capabilities of subterranean life herself: her earlier research included the discovery of slow-growing bacteria living under enormous pressure at the bottom of a goldmine in South Africa, where they subsist solely on the byproducts of radioactive energy.

Unfortunately, the other extreme environment in which many of these extremophiles thrive is the spacecraft assembly room in which we visited Perseverance, the rover Nasa was about to send to look for life on Mars. Nasa's rigorous cleaning and decontamination processes turn out to inadvertently select for the kinds of microorganisms that don't mind high heat, extreme aridity and low nutrient levels. Dotted around the facility, in between the rover, its heat shield and its descent stage, were what the microbiologist Kasthuri Venkateswaran called "witness plates" – two-inch-square samples of the materials used to build the spacecraft, which he periodically swabs to develop a snapshot of the room's bacterial inhabitants.

Venkateswaran, who is universally known as Venkat, told us that his inventories of clean-room biodiversity have revealed the mundane and the extraordinary living side by side. “I don’t want to see the headline that dog shit is in the Jet Propulsion Laboratory clean room,” he warned us, before admitting that, despite all the precautions, microbes that are found almost exclusively in dogs’ guts still show up on his witness plates, shed by engineers with pets. Meanwhile, in 2009, Venkat discovered an entirely new genus of extremely salt- and acid-tolerant bacteria on the surface of a spacecraft, which he named *Rummeliibacillus*, after John Rummel, the former planetary protection officer. In 2016, researchers came across *Rummeliibacillus* again, this time in soil from Antarctica. Other novel organisms isolated from the clean room have since shown up in a Colorado mine and a hydrothermal vent at the bottom of the Indian Ocean.

Venkat’s microbial census serves several purposes. He archives them, storing thousands of strains of bacteria in a special freezer in anticipation of a future scenario in which life is discovered in a sample from Mars, and researchers need to rule out the possibility that we actually carried it there and back with us. He also uses them as model organisms with which to develop new cleaning and sterilisation technologies. “If we’re able to knock these hardies, then we will be able to kill the other stuff also,” he said.

Recently, he has started sending some of the toughest candidates up for 18-month stints aboard the International Space Station, to test whether they might be able to survive a lengthy journey under the intense UV [radiation](#) of space. One strain of *Bacillus pumilus*, named SAFR-032 (where SAF stands for spacecraft assembly facility), was damaged but not killed by its vacation in the vacuum of space – which, Venkat told us, means it could “potentially survive for millions of years once deposited on the Martian surface”. (He is now analysing the survivors to see whether their unique UV-resistant biochemistry could be adapted for use in sunscreen.)

Some of Earth’s extremophiles are now Martians; that much is evident. “We know there’s life on Mars already because we sent it there,” Nasa’s former chief scientist John Grunsfeld admitted in 2015. Whether these microbes can emerge from dormancy and grow – whether they, as Venkat put it, are capable of “making the red planet green” – is much less well understood. Nasa’s research programme was designed to accumulate the data necessary

to produce a more efficient planetary quarantine programme. But while it has yielded a wealth of new knowledge about Earth and space, it seems to have raised more questions than it has answered.

“We can use all these wonderful instruments that we load on to vehicles like Curiosity and we can send them there,” Penelope Boston admitted. “We can do all this fabulous orbital stuff. But, frankly speaking, as a person with at least one foot in Earth science, until you’ve got the stuff in your hands – actual physical samples – there is a lot you can’t do.”

Perseverance, or Percy, as Nasa has begun to call it, which embarked on its journey to Mars just a few months after our visit, and landed safely in February 2021, represents the first step towards alleviating that frustration. We marvelled at it from behind stanchions as engineers pointed out the UV spectrometer intended to search for trace organic chemistry, and the tiny chunk of Martian meteorite, recovered from Oman and donated by London’s Natural History Museum, that is mounted on to the instrument’s robotic arm to serve as a calibration target. We scribbled notes about which deodorant technicians are allowed to wear (Mitchum unscented) on special, shiny blue clean-room paper, bonded with polyethylene so it doesn’t shed lint and particles – in the context of spacecraft assembly, normal paper is considered a contaminant. But the part we really wanted to see – the carousel of 43 cigar-sized metal tubes that will ultimately hold the Martian rocks that Perseverance will drill and cache – wasn’t there.

As it turned out, the tubes were in a nearby building, awaiting final sterilisation: oven-baking at high temperatures for an extended period in a process that would damage the other instruments on the rover but will successfully eliminate any trace of terrestrial biochemistry. After that, they would be shipped to Cape Canaveral separately, in a vacuum backfilled with inert gas. “They don’t get installed until right before we actually find our way out to the top of the rocket itself, because we want to keep them as pristine as possible,” David Gruel, the mission assembly, test and launch operations manager, told us. “They’re certainly the cleanest thing we’ve ever taken to Mars.”

“Officially, every time we go into space, we go into quarantine first,” the retired Italian astronaut Paolo Nespoli told us. “I did a total of five official quarantines – one time at Cape Canaveral and four times with the Russians in Baikonur.”

Even before humanity tackles the much larger challenge of sending people to another planet – and bringing them safely back, along with any alien germs they might have picked up – quarantine has become an essential part of the spaceflight pre-launch timeline. The practice can be traced back to Apollo 7, an 11-day mission that was intended to test the future lunar command module. All three astronauts came down with severe head colds, and, in microgravity, the congestion proved more debilitating than on Earth. Tempers frayed, culminating in a minor mutiny in which the astronauts defied ground control by refusing to wear their helmets during re-entry and landing, so that they could still “pop” their ears and relieve sinus pressure.

Charles Berry, the Nasa flight surgeon at the time, immediately instituted a strict quarantine protocol to protect astronauts from any exposure to germs that might make them sick in space, even refusing to let Richard Nixon have a prelaunch dinner with the Apollo 11 astronauts. “I guess that’s as close as I ever came to getting fired in my life,” Berry recalled in his Nasa oral history. “If they came down with anything, whatever it was – a cough, a sniffle or anything else – we were going to have to prove that it didn’t come from the moon.”

Nespoli didn’t pay much attention to quarantine during his spaceflight days: “You do it because it needs to be done.” That said, he was intrigued by the difference between the American implementation of quarantine and its Russian equivalent. “Somehow the quarantine in the United States, it’s a very hectic time,” he said. Nasa keeps astronauts busy with technical meetings, training sessions, rigid mealtimes and treadmill sessions in the tiny exercise room. “You do this, you do that – a lot of things are happening,” Nespoli recalled. The astronauts are confined to a single, artificially lit building in order to shift their circadian clock on to the flight schedule, or MET (Mission Elapsed Time), as it’s officially known. “It doesn’t matter if it’s 3am outside. They tell you it’s 10 o’clock in the morning and you get bright light,” he said. “You get shifted in this way.”

“Now, the Russians, to be frank, they don’t care.” Nespoli laughed. “They have a completely different attitude.”

[How a tax haven is leading the race to privatise space](#)

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In Baikonur, the crew stay in a huge compound originally built to house the head of the Russian space agency. The astronaut Scott Kelly wrote that it is “affectionately called ‘Saddam’s Palace’ by Americans,” thanks to its marble floors, glittering chandeliers, ensuite Jacuzzis and pressed linen tablecloths. “I wouldn’t say it’s a vacation, because it’s not quite like that, but it’s much more relaxed,” Nespoli told us. He recalled going for walks in the extensive grounds, unwinding with the help of the in-house massage therapist, and enjoying three-course lunches and dinners every day.

“You still do the training and the technical stuff,” Nespoli said, but the Russians seem to understand that the crew needs to rest and recharge, letting go of Earthly stress before the rigours of space.

Reflecting on quarantine during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, Nespoli was struck with renewed force by this prior experience. “Quarantine in Baikonur is really a moment where you just let go of everything,” he said. Beyond its obvious value in risk reduction, under the right circumstances quarantine can also offer an emotional and intellectual buffer – a necessary psychological cushion before crossing from one world to another.

Similarly, the extended isolation posed by space travel itself – trapped for months on end in a confined space, connected to friends and family only through video calls – was made bearable by considering the alternative. “I was glad I was inside,” Nespoli said, “because if I was outside, I would have been dead. I think you can look at that as like lockdown in a certain way: you are quarantined, but you feel kind of free, because you are safe.”

This is an edited extract from [Until Proven Safe: The History and Future of Quarantine](#) by Geoff Manaugh and Nicola Twilley, published by Macmillan on 22 July and available at guardianbookshop.com

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OpinionEuro 2020

Southgate showed us a new England. But the old one hasn't gone away

David Olusoga

The team gave us an insight into a modern nation. The racial abuse they received shows it won't be an easy transition



‘England’s togetherness and commitment to anti-racism is the voice of the generation they represent.’ England and Italy players take the knee before Sunday’s Euro 2020 final. Photograph: Paul Ellis/Getty Images

‘England’s togetherness and commitment to anti-racism is the voice of the generation they represent.’ England and Italy players take the knee before Sunday’s Euro 2020 final. Photograph: Paul Ellis/Getty Images

Tue 13 Jul 2021 01.00 EDT

Despite England’s collective sense of heartbreak, we could and should have been able to spend this week celebrating a second place finish at the Euros – a result that just a month ago would have been regarded as an extraordinary success.

We should be busy pouring adulation upon an England team that exceeded expectations. We should be projecting their image and their remarkable backstories around the world, promoting their togetherness and their ethos as an expression of the best aspects of England and Englishness.

Instead, in a damp week, in a so-far largely dismal summer, as a third wave of a pandemic spreads invisibly among us, we are forced to defend our national team from an [outpouring of hate](#). In doing so we have no choice but

to confront the very worst aspects of English football, and the ugliest strains of English nationalism.

The toxic racism and swaggering hyper-nationalism that has for decades accrued around the English game has contaminated our national symbols, left millions feeling excluded from the national game, and damaged our reputation abroad. The rot has grown deeper in recent months, in part because our political leaders have allowed that poison to fester and – when they calculated that it was in their electoral interests – cynically [refused to condemn it](#).

This tournament has been a tale of two Englands. In one of those Englands the national anthems of other nations are booed and fans from rival nations, some of them women and children, are [abused in the stadiums](#) and on the streets. In that nation, thugs throw bottles across Leicester Square and [storm Wembley itself](#). In that England some “supporters” believe it is acceptable to boo our own young players, for deciding to support one another in the face of racist abuse ceaselessly directed at the black members of the squad.

Right now it is that England that is being written about in newspapers across Europe: the thuggery and the racism are the big stories, displacing the astonishing tale of England’s revival under Gareth Southgate. We should perhaps be relieved that Sunday’s violence took place in our own capital rather than in Rome, Paris or Berlin.

The alternative England, the one embodied by Southgate’s team itself, is a nation that seems to flicker in and out of existence. The last time it openly celebrated its existence was three years ago, during the World Cup, when the team reached the semi-finals. Before that, it was nine years ago when, in another London stadium, we watched the [opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics](#): a celebration of youth, creativity and diversity. Since that occasion we have had the “hostile environment”, Brexit, the Windrush scandal, and the ceaseless and calculated demonisation of Black Lives Matter and all things “woke”.

Southgate’s England – encapsulated in his [Dear England](#) letter before this year’s tournament began – is united, youthful and instinctively forward-thinking. It is diverse, and comfortable in its diversity. It has the potential, if

we were able to fully embrace it, to reclaim and decontaminate national symbols. This England team aims to write its own history – in stark contrast to the cult of bitter, backwards-looking jingoism that exists among sections of its fanbase (the “10 German bombers”, “Two world wars, one World Cup” version of English identity).

From the start of Euro 2020, both of those Englands have been on display. In the capital of a nation still in denial about its imperial past, in a stadium originally built for an exhibition to celebrate the British empire, during a European tournament in which [around a third of the players](#) are people of colour – most able to trace their roots back to Europe’s lost empires – England fielded a team made up of young men whose ancestors come from Ireland, Jamaica, St Kitts, Trinidad and Tobago, and Nigeria. [Their backstories](#) speak of historical truths we have yet to process. Their togetherness and commitment to anti-racism is the voice of the generation they represent, encouraged and amplified by Southgate’s leadership.

Their talent and their stories invite us to reimagine what English patriotism could mean. But where there should have been support, there was booing; when there could have been political leadership, there was opportunism.

For Boris Johnson’s government, the booing of the England team in the buildup to the tournament was a moment freighted with potential. Guided by its culture war strategising, it became its equivalent of [Donald Trump’s response](#) to a murderous attack by white supremacists on demonstrators in Charlottesville, Virginia. Less crude and more calculating than Trump, Johnson and his advisers had no need to describe booing England fans as “very fine people”. Instead they spoke through silence; refusing to condemn them and dismissing the taking of the knee by England’s players as “[gesture politics](#)”. The message was clear.

During the tournament the thinktank British Future [released the results of a survey](#) that showed that one in 10 people regard Englishness as a racial identity. In their minds, black people can never truly be English. Not many decades ago many more than 10% of us held that view. Yet although outnumbered, that 10% are never silent.

While England were winning, their hate was largely exiled to the toxic margins of social media. But literally within minutes of the team's first and only defeat, and given a free pass by the government to target their national team, those who believe blackness and Englishness are mutually exclusive [unleashed their fury](#) against the black players who missed penalties.

The ugly events since Sunday's defeat have forced us to acknowledge just how deep the gulf between our Englands run. But the shame and shock that many people feel at the abuse directed against England's black players will not halt the drumbeat of calculated provocation and wilful division that has helped bring us to this point. That campaign is sanctioned by politicians so shameless that last week they donned [newly purchased England tops](#), to cheer on a team whose moral stance they had derided only last month.

Yet, despite the brutal clarity of this moment, what Southgate's team have done remains astonishing. They have made an appeal to the best aspects of Englishness and done so against the direction of play, during an era in which politicians mobilise our worst instincts and darkest fears. Twenty-six young men and their remarkable manager have again reminded us that there is another path, another form of English patriotism, another way of being together and – if enough of us want it – another England.

- David Olusoga is a historian and broadcaster

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Books

In a New Zealand estuary, I closed my eyes and floated. It turned out the water was toxic

Ingrid Horrocks

Ingrid Horrocks learned to swim in the wild – but no river or lake where she grew up is ‘swimmable’ any more



‘I wanted to remember why we swam in the first place, and to reclaim why it seemed to matter.’ A tourist swimming in Hooker Lake, Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park. Photograph: Grant Rooney Premium/Alamy

‘I wanted to remember why we swam in the first place, and to reclaim why it seemed to matter.’ A tourist swimming in Hooker Lake, Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park. Photograph: Grant Rooney Premium/Alamy

Mon 12 Jul 2021 13.30 EDT

For most of those of us who swim, swimming is not something we think about: it is something we do.

I learned to swim in the sea, as some of us did in Aotearoa [New Zealand](#) in the early 1980s, walking down to the beach with my Auckland primary school. One of my earliest memories is of graduating to the “heads under” group and of sucking salt from my hair.

Later, my family’s regular summer spot was a swimming hole in the river running through our Wairarapa farm, where occasionally I persuaded our old farm horse to swim with me. These days I swim with my own children. We go most often to the beautiful, bracingly chilly sea off the south coast of Wellington, where the summer water temperature sits around 16C.

[Wild swimming in a pandemic: 'It is a lifelong education in facing down fear' | Bonnie Tsui](#)

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But over recent years, as a result of a number of reports on the state of our waters, the word “swimmable” has entered our collective vocabulary. Our waters have been damaged by a long history of land conversion for cities and agriculture, and now by run-off and reduced water flow from newly intensive farming practices and more frequent droughts. Which of our rivers and lakes are still swimmable? How many of our beaches? How many are not?



Owharoa falls, inside Karangahake Gorge, is a popular swimming spot in Waikato, New Zealand. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

The New Zealand government now publishes a website called [Can I Swim Here?](#) This past summer, although the beaches around Wellington were generally fine, not a single river or lake in the wider region where my family and I live was deemed safe for immersion of the human body.

Back in 2017, after a particularly grim report on our waters appeared, accompanied at that point by little sign of collective action, I decided to drive from Wellington to Auckland over a long weekend and swim in as many places, and in as many ways, as I could. I wanted to remember why it was we swam in the first place, and to reclaim why it seemed to matter.

“Wild swimming” isn’t really a term used in Aotearoa, but that was clearly what I was doing, leaping out of the car to take a dip in a small rural creek, and skinny-dipping below sandstone cliffs in pristine water at Ototoka. I had a wonderful early morning swim with a childhood friend in the Tokomaru River in the Manawatū. We were almost out before we were in, our skin humming. I swam across a small lake, clearing weed away from my face at each stroke.

And I swam in a tidal estuary at Mōkau on the upper Taranaki Bight, lying on my back, toes poking out, hands fluttering like vestigial wings, and let myself drift, water lapping around my ears. For a while I closed my eyes, letting the tide carry me, feeling the press of the water's echoey breath. As the minutes stretched, the water seemed to enter my body, my limbs becoming liquid.



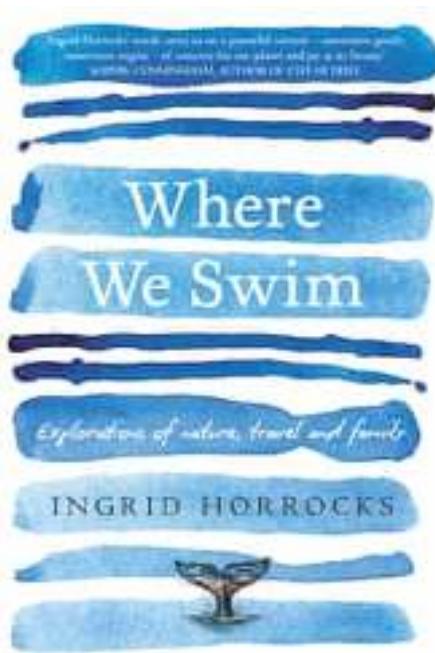
'The water seemed to enter my body, my limbs becoming liquid': Mōkau river in New Zealand. Photograph: denizunlusu/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Often, it was impossible to tell anything was wrong. But then it turned out where I had swum with my friend was "Code Red". There was an E coli warning in place: dangerous levels of animal and/or human faeces in the water. Shit. In the lake, there was the intermittent risk of toxic algae from farm run-off. By the end of my journey, I had developed a urinary tract infection. Even if not directly attributable to the toxicity of the water I had chosen to swim in, it felt like my body's physical response.

That was when I first began to properly understand, to feel in my body, what it might mean for the environment to be damaged enough to endanger us.

My determination to swim anyway was, I now think, partly a refusal to let that be how it would be, even here, in this country, the water already too

damaged to bother. It was a refusal to accept and simply stay home on dry land. But it was also an attempt to translate backwards from abstractions such as counting rivers by length or by swimmability, or abstract discussions of “the climate crisis”. It was an attempt to put my whole body into it. [Swimming](#) felt like a form of animal engagement and involvement – of necessary immersion.



To explore what it means to swim is also to ask what is at stake in a place becoming unswimmable – for other beings, too, who also need water to live. And for waters themselves. In Māori understanding, all water has *mauri*, life force. Some waters such as *ngā awa*, rivers, are ancestors. A recent legal settlement [acknowledged the legal personhood of the Whanganui river](#).

By the time I finished that first swimming journey, I had come to see swimming not just as a bracketed, pleasurable summery activity it would be a shame to lose, but as one way we experience ourselves as part of this Earth, with its seas and tributaries, its veins of rivers and lakes. And the brevity of the time we have.

- *Where We Swim* by Ingrid Horrocks is [out now through UQP](#)
-

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Which inanimate object would I have a relationship with? York Minster

[Emma Beddington](#)



New film Jumbo was inspired by a woman who fell in love with the Eiffel Tower. It sounds weird, but – trust me – in a more measured way it can happen to anyone



Emma Beddington...‘York Minster still gives me goose bumps after 40 years of familiarity.’ Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Emma Beddington...‘York Minster still gives me goose bumps after 40 years of familiarity.’ Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Tue 13 Jul 2021 02.00 EDT

Jumbo, a new [film about a woman who falls in love with a fairground ride](#), sounds charming despite the strange premise. The film-maker Zoé Wittock was inspired by Erika Eiffel, the woman who married the Eiffel Tower; other objectophiliacs have fallen for chandeliers, briefcases and bridges.

In a more measured way, there seems to be a lot of it about. A wild swimming friend calls her preferred body of water her “pond boyfriend”; another friend sends me a picture of her bargain shiatsu massager with the message “I have a new lover.” My American friend tells me she’d “have a threesome with Marks AND Spencer”, which is troublingly generic: which branch? It also illustrates the erotic thrill of the unfamiliar because I can’t think of anything less arousing than aisles of Percy Pigs and Per Una.

Constrained horizons mean this has been a time of forming strong attachments to particular spoons or rings on the hob; it’s another facet of our pandemic oddness. When my son recently returned from several months

away, I had to explain the new layers of complexity I had added to my hierarchy of mugs to stop him desecrating my favoured ones with protein powder. There have been three people in my marriage ever since my husband got his histrionic, high-maintenance coffee machine: he's in thrall to its alarming emissions of steam and water and constant dramatic demands to be descaled, filled or emptied.

If I could pick any inanimate object with which to have a relationship, [it would be York Minster](#), a building that still gives me goose bumps after 40-plus years of familiarity, but I have enough self-knowledge to know I would be punching stratospherically above my weight. My dysfunctional, co-dependent relationship with our robot vacuum cleaner – I really need it, but it's so annoying – would require years of couples therapy to unpick. So what's left? There's a silicone spatula I'm very fond of: it's unassuming but effective, with a certain discreet style. We complement each other; we work well together. I think that's what they call “relationship goals”.

Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

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Miami

‘It’s a hotbed’: Miami’s role in Haiti murder plot fits decades-long pattern

Exile communities, ready supply of military veterans, history of corrupt politics and drugs money make city a nexus for mayhem



The exile communities, such as those in Little Haiti, operate almost like autonomous countries. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

The exile communities, such as those in Little Haiti, operate almost like autonomous countries. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters



Julian Borger

Tue 13 Jul 2021 01.30 EDT

One of the less surprising developments in the unfolding mystery of the assassination of Haitian president Jovenel Moïse is the central role of Miami in the whole story.

For decades, Miami has been the launching pad and a byword for half-baked plots and coups – from the Bay of Pigs, the failed [invasion of Cuba in 1961](#), to last year's harebrained [raid on Venezuela](#), and now, allegedly, last week's [murder of the Haitian president](#). Most of the supposed participants were killed or arrested in the 24 hours after the murder.

The [main suspect](#), Christian Emmanuel Sanon, is a Haitian with strong ties to the Miami area, as has another Haitian-American detained by the Haiti authorities, and the security firm alleged to have recruited the Colombian mercenaries accused of involvement in the attack has an office in Doral, near to Miami International airport and Donald Trump's golf resort.

The security firm reportedly named by some of the plotters calls itself the Counter Terrorist Unit Federal Academy (CTU) and is run by a Venezuelan exile. When [Miami Herald reporters](#) went to knock on the door of its modest offices, no one opened the door.

['His head wasn't in the world of reality': how the plot to invade Venezuela fell apart](#)

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It is all reminiscent of the ill-fated [Operation Gideon](#), a brazen abortive raid on Venezuela in May last year, hatched in Miami by exiles and mercenaries run by a gung-ho former Green Beret, Jordan Goudreau. That plot left eight people dead and 100 arrested. As in Haiti, the raiders were paraded in front of the cameras by the government they were supposed to overthrow, to rub in the humiliation.

Miami has all the ingredients required for a nexus of mayhem: several exile communities, dreaming and scheming about a return to power in their home countries, a ready supply of military veterans with Latin American and Caribbean experience from US Southern Command, headquartered in Doral, and a long history of corrupt, ethnically driven local politics to provide a permissive environment.

Narco-dollars from the cocaine trade have historically served as the connective tissue and lubricant between these three pillars.

In her book on Miami, author Joan Didion wrote that its exiles were under “a collective spell, an occult enchantment from that febrile complex of resentments and revenges and idealizations and taboos which renders exile so potent an organizing principle”.

The urban sprawl that runs up the coast from Miami to Fort Lauderdale to West Palm Beach is home to the diaspora of most Latin American states, but the three most significant and active communities today are Cuban, Venezuelan and Haitian.

The Cubans have traditionally been based in Little Havana, just west of downtown Miami. A few miles to the north is the densely packed neighbourhood of Little Haiti. The Miami Venezuelans are more dispersed but the biggest concentration is in Doral.

“It’s the exile headquarters of the world,” said Ann Louise Bardach, who reported extensively on the city for her book *Cuba Confidential: Love and*

Vengeance in Miami and Havana. “It’s because Florida is a peninsula that is basically a dagger cutting into the Caribbean and aimed at Latin America.”

The exile communities, Bardach said, operate almost like autonomous countries, with their own internal governance, their political machines, their own radio stations and newspapers.

“It’s a hotbed: people aching for their homeland,” she said. “They are all governments-in-waiting, and they all think they are about to take power next week.”

Each of the exile communities inevitably has its own relationship with US intelligence and their aspirations have played a role in US foreign policy.

[Haiti president’s assassination: what we know so far](#)
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Cuban exile militias trained in the Everglades ever since the 1959 revolution, coming under the control of Jorge Mas Canosa, an exile who became a major force in Florida politics and in Washington. This week, Cuban Americans are threatening to set sail in a flotilla of small boats from Miami to bring aid to protesting Cubans, despite warnings from the US Coast Guard.

“If one of those Florida Cuban American vessels goes into Cuban waters, the Cuban border guard could overreact, and then that puts the United States in a very, very difficult position,” said Vicki Huddleston, former US ambassador in Havana.

The Cuban and Venezuelan diaspora vote played a significant part in [swinging Florida to Trump in 2016 and 2020](#).

The city’s Haitian community has historically had less clout, but it has been a major force in Haitian affairs, while helping drive the demand for the security companies that have sprouted up across South Florida.

“The longstanding precarious nature of Haiti’s security environment is such that Haitian elites have long relied upon private security firms to ensure their

own personal security,” said Jenna Ben-Yehuda, a former Haiti analyst at the US state department, and now president of the Truman National Security Project.

“The presence of private security has been pervasive throughout Haiti for decades, probably exceeding the number of Haitian national police officers.”

There are plenty of firms run by former US special forces soldiers seeking a comfortable retirement, like Goudreau. The firm named by the Haitian police as recruiting the Colombians in the attack on Moïse, CTU, did not have quite the same pedigree. Its owner, Tony Intriago, boasted of police experience in Latin America, and special forces connections, according to a [Miami Herald](#) profile, but none of it was confirmed. The Haitian police have so far not presented evidence of CTU’s involvement, and Intriago has been unavailable for comment since the assassination.

The initial signs suggest that the Haiti operation was aimed at something far more ambitious than mere murder, up to and including regime change. The fact that it fell well short, and [simply added to the misery and chaos](#) of its target country, is in many ways, just another Miami hallmark.

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[Rights and freedomGhana](#)

Arrested, abused and accused: wave of repression targets LGBT+ Ghanaians

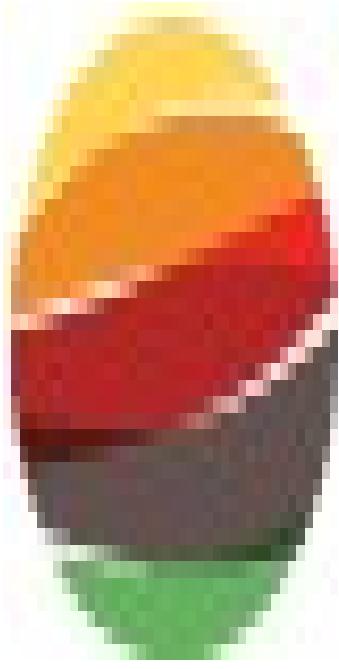
Opening of community space in Accra, which was quickly shut, has been the trigger for new anti-LGBT+ action



Ghanians detained on suspicion of promoting an LGBT+ agenda at an unlawful assembly are escorted out of court by police after a bail hearing in Ho on 4 June. Photograph: Francis Kokoroko/Reuters

Ghanians detained on suspicion of promoting an LGBT+ agenda at an unlawful assembly are escorted out of court by police after a bail hearing in Ho on 4 June. Photograph: Francis Kokoroko/Reuters

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HUMANITY UNITED

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Emmanuel Akinwotu in Ho City

Tue 13 Jul 2021 00.00 EDT

“All I wanted to do was help vulnerable people,” said Shaun Apong, tears streaking down his face, from behind the bars of a squalid police cell in Ho City in eastern [Ghana](#).

Apong was one of 21 people arrested in early June, charged with unlawful assembly and accused of spreading an LGBT+ agenda, amid a marked and sudden increase in sensitivities around the rights and advocacy of gay and queer people in the west African country.

For years, Apong (not his real name) had held training sessions for paralegals, activists and care workers on how to support vulnerable groups. “We were never afraid to conduct the training because we aren’t breaking the law,” he said.

Apong and the others were arrested during a training session after police were called by local journalists. “They were acting as if we were criminals caught in the crime,” he said, with the reporters harassing attendants and taking pictures of their faces. Pamphlets and books, such as one encouraging

parents of LGBT+ people to love their children despite their sexuality, were held up as evidence of a “gay agenda”.

The accused were repeatedly denied bail for three weeks before being released at the end of June pending a trial. Many, including Apong, are now spending their freedom in secret safe houses outside the city. With each week, the toll of the ongoing case mounts, under the glare of national attention.

Ho, a hilly, gently paced city with lush green landscapes, is now the scene of a landmark trial that has caught national attention in Ghana – and upended the lives of those involved.

“I have a business, a family who knows who I am; after this I can survive, but many of these people have lost everything,” Apong said in a second interview from his safe house. “Some of them have been abandoned by their families. One woman’s husband told her never to come home. What about her children? Six of them have kids. Some have already been told by their employers don’t bother coming back to work”

Since early this year, a sudden and chilling wave of repression against LGBT+ people has quickly turned a fraught but negotiable environment for gay and queer advocacy into something more dangerous.

Politicians, Christian and civil groups have led a wave of protest against the rights of sexual minorities in the country, after the opening of a community space in the capital Accra in January. In February [the space was shut down](#), and ever since, arrests of LGBT+ advocates and incidents of abuse have been rising.

The outrage over the community space, fanned by figures capitalising on anti-gay sentiment, may result in lasting change. Lawmakers and government officials in President Nana Akufo-Addo’s administration have vowed to pass new anti-gay laws.

Addo, widely courted by western governments, is often cast as a liberally inclined pro-democracy figure in a region beset by political instability and repression. Yet western diplomats and rights advocates have been urging his

government to row back on anti-gay rhetoric, and to scrap proposed anti-gay legislation that would reshape perceptions of his administration.



Nana Akufo Addo in Madrid with the Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, in March. Photograph: Zipi/EPA

A group of eight lawmakers, led by Sam George, have proposed new anti-gay laws, submitted to parliament on 29 June. “The promotion of proper human sexual rights and Ghanaian family values bill” would be a “landmark legislation” criminalising the advocacy and act of homosexuality, George said.

“Unnatural carnal knowledge” – often interpreted as non-heterosexual sex – is unlawful in Ghana. Prosecutions are rare, yet experiences of the justice system are often in themselves punishing.

In the case against the 21 accused in Ho, as well as denying their bail, the judges continuously adjourned the hearings, leaving the defendants in despair. At hearings, prosecution lawyers cited finding condoms as part of the evidence against the accused. “They were making strange arguments that don’t even make sense,” said an activist at one of the hearings. “Is a condom evidence of criminality?”

In March, a [letter](#) signed by Naomi Campbell, Idris Elba and Vogue editor Edward Enninful criticised the treatment of LGBT+ people in Ghana amid global attention on the closure of the community space.

The proposed legislation in itself marks a turning point in Ghanaian life, said Fatima Derby, a feminist writer. “Even discussing the bill signals to people that this is something we need to stamp out,” she said from a cafe in Accra.

“This is maybe the worst period I’ve seen in Ghana, in terms of the safety of LGBT+ people. Many people are very fearful for their lives and their safety,” she said, adding that the events this year had had a chilling effect on various forms of activism in Ghana. “If five or six activists gather in a place like this, it feels like they could storm in and accuse us, too.”

Before this year, ordinary life for many gay and queer people in Ghana was precarious, but managed. “You would see queer Nigerians in Accra for fun,” said Phoebe (not their real name), a non-binary 27-year-old health worker.

“People in Ghana had this idea of ‘Yeah, this person is gay, that person is gay,’ but there was like a distance to it. You do you, I do me,” they said. “There was abuse, for sure, so many dangers, but on the whole, compared to some places, it felt manageable. Now, even to go out to certain places, you’re second-guessing yourself, like, maybe it’s not wise any more.”

Images from the opening ceremony for the Accra community space spread rapidly, some showing the Australian ambassador to Ghana in attendance. They fuelled two linked sentiments that are common in Africa: that LGBT+ groups are establishing a more institutional presence, and that homosexuality is a western construct, despite the long history of multiple sexualities in many African cultures.

Among some advocates, the presence of western officials raised questions about the risks of visible western support for LGBT+ causes in Africa.



Alex Kofi Donkor

The uproar in Ghana over the community space felt unprecedented, said 28-year-old Alex Kofi Donkor, who founded the group that had set it up.

“It was all over TV, the radio stations, talkshows. Politicians, traditional leaders, everyone was being asked about it, knowing that if they don’t say the right answer – that it is wrong, it should be stamped out – they would be made a target,” Donkor said. Yet the outrage also presented an opportunity and spurred activism. “That was the first time we were having a national conversation about LGBT issues, talking to the media squarely.”

For months Donkor has been publicly and fiercely defending LGBT+ rights in Ghanaian media. The approach taken by Donkor’s organisation highlights a significant divergence among activists in repressive countries. Many groups that work on LGBT+ rights in Ghana do so discreetly, organising under more ambiguous or generic causes.

“There’s a generational change. There is this backdoor, quiet approach, then a more confrontational approach, by a younger generation who are more specific about what they want,” Donkor said.

“Some older activists are saying, ‘Maybe be quieter, maybe do things more carefully,’ but people are tired and want to speak out. They don’t want to

make subtle steps when in reality their lives are on the line.”

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Business live

Business

US inflation accelerates to 13-year high; Bank of England warns of risk-taking – as it happened

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Iran unveils state-approved Islamic dating app to boost marriage

Users of app Hamdam have to take a psychology test, and successful matches will be accompanied by a consultant for the first four years of marriage



Iran dating app Hamdam is part of the Islamic republic's efforts to tackle declining birth rates and the rising age of marriage. Photograph: Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA

Iran dating app Hamdam is part of the Islamic republic's efforts to tackle declining birth rates and the rising age of marriage. Photograph: Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA

Agence France-Presse
Mon 12 Jul 2021 20.47 EDT

Iran has unveiled a state-sanctioned Islamic dating app aimed at facilitating “lasting and informed marriage” for its youth, state television reported.

Called Hamdam – Farsi for “companion” – the service allows users to “search for and choose their spouse”, the broadcaster said on Monday.

It is the only state-sanctioned platform of its kind in the Islamic republic, according to Iran’s cyberspace police chief, Colonel Ali Mohammad Rajabi. While dating apps are popular in Iran, Rajabi said that all other platforms apart from Hamdam were illegal.

Developed by the Tebyan Cultural Institute, part of Iran’s Islamic Propaganda Organization, Hamdam’s website claims it uses “artificial intelligence” to find matches “only for bachelors seeking permanent marriage and a single spouse”.

Tebyan head Komeil Khojasteh, speaking at the unveiling, said family values were threatened by outside forces. “Family is the devil’s target, and [Iran’s enemies] seek to impose their own ideas” on it, he said, adding that the app helps create “healthy” families.

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According to Hamdam’s website, users have to verify their identity and go through a “psychology test” before browsing.

When a match is made, the app “introduces the families together with the presence of service consultants”, who will “accompany” the couple for four years after marriage.

Registration is free, because Hamdam has “an independent revenue model”, the website said without explaining further.

Iran’s authorities, including the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have warned several times about the country’s rising age of marriage and declining birth rates.

In March, Iran's conservative-dominated parliament passed a bill titled "population growth and supporting families".

It mandates the government to offer significant financial incentives for marriage and to encourage people to have more than two children, while limiting access to abortion.

The law awaits approval by the Guardian Council, which is tasked with checking that bills are compatible with Islamic law and the constitution.

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House Democrats tell Senate: exempt voting rights bill from filibuster

Filibuster exception would allow Democrats to push through their voting rights reform bill over unanimous Republican opposition



The House majority whip, James Clyburn, is pushing Senate Democrats to end the filibuster for constitutional measures. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

The House majority whip, James Clyburn, is pushing Senate Democrats to end the filibuster for constitutional measures. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Hugo Lowell in Washington

Tue 13 Jul 2021 03.00 EDT

Top [Democrats](#) in the House are spearheading a new effort to convince the Senate to carve out a historic exception to the filibuster that would allow them to push through their marquee voting rights and election reform legislation over unanimous Republican opposition.

The sweeping measure to expand voting rights known as S1 fell victim to a Republican filibuster last month after the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, and his leadership team unified the conference to sink the bill in a party-line vote.

Now, furious at Republicans for weaponizing the filibuster against Joe Biden's legislative agenda, the House majority whip, James Clyburn, is pushing Senate Democrats to end its use for constitutional measures, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The rare and forceful effort from a member of the House leadership to pressure changes in the Senate underscores the alarm among Democrats that the filibuster may be an insurmountable obstacle as they race to overturn a wave of Republican ballot restrictions.

Ending the use of the filibuster for constitutional measures – and lowering the threshold to pass legislation to a simple majority in the 50-50 Senate – is significant as it would almost certainly pave the way for Democrats to expand voting across the US.

The voting rights and election reform legislation remains of singular importance to Democrats as they seek to counter new voter restrictions in Republican-led states introduced in response to Trump's lies about a stolen 2020 presidential election.

Clyburn's proposal to change Senate rules is intended to be limited. It would not eliminate the filibuster entirely, and would allow senators in the minority party to continue to deploy the procedural tactic on other types of legislation.

The problem, as Democrats see it, is that Republicans in recent years have all but rewritten Senate rules to force supermajorities even for bills that carry bipartisan support. Filibustering bills, once extremely rare, has now become routine.

The proposal to create an exception to the filibuster for constitutional measures mirrors the exception Democrats carved out for judicial

nominations in 2013, after Republicans blocked President Barack Obama's picks for cabinet posts and the federal judiciary.

Clyburn's proposal is particularly notable, the sources said, since it is broadly supported by the rest of the House Democratic leadership and is considered by the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, to be the only way to break the logjam in the Senate.

The effort to create exceptions to the filibuster is being led by Clyburn in large part because of the influence he carries with the White House and the affinity he enjoys with Biden on a personal level, the sources said. Clyburn, a South Carolina congressman, was influential in securing his state for Biden in the 2020 race for the Democratic nomination – something that rescued Biden's campaign from disaster.

When Biden endorsed partial reforms to the filibuster in March, the prospect of Democrats taking action to defang the minority party's ability to stall legislation, shifted almost overnight from a theoretical question to a possible reality on Capitol Hill.

The details of what Biden endorsed was far less important than the fact he backed reform at all, and Clyburn, encouraged by that reception, has spoken to the White House counsellor Steve Ricchetti and Vice-President Kamala Harris to back his proposal, the sources said.

McConnell, the top Republican in the Senate, told the Guardian on Monday he was deeply unimpressed by Clyburn's maneuvers. "If it's not broken, it doesn't need fixing," McConnell said of the filibuster, adding he would "absolutely" oppose any changes.

Clyburn's outreach to top Senate Democrats and the Biden administration comes after the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, brought the issue of filibuster reform to the forefront by forcing votes last month on some of Biden's most high-profile measures.

The idea was to show to moderate Democrats opposed to filibuster reform – most notably Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema – that Republicans under

McConnell will sink any Democratic policy proposals in an attempt to obstruct the administration.

Schumer is still strategizing over how to advance S1 after vowing to reintroduce the bill following its defeat, according to a source familiar with his thinking. “In the fight for voting rights, this vote was the starting gun, not the finish line,” Schumer said.

But carving out an exception to the filibuster for constitutional measures such as voting rights legislation, first floated by the number three Senate Democrat, Patty Murray, appears to be the primary option despite resistance from the likes of Manchin and Sinema.

Democrats open to making the change have previously indicated that their argument that the minority party should not have the power to repeatedly block legislation with widespread support resonates with the wider American public.

They have also suggested that only partially ending its use could have fewer consequences for them should their political fortunes reverse as soon as after the 2022 midterms and they are thrust into the minority, trying to block Republican legislation.

“The people did not give Democrats the House, Senate and White House to compromise with insurrectionists,” the Democratic congresswoman Ayanna Pressley wrote on Twitter after Republicans blocked S1, illustrating the sentiment. “Abolish the filibuster so we can do the people’s work.”

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