

Letters to the editor

On war, Joe Biden, Pakistan, abortion, social media, Aristotle, The global normalcy index, Rembrandt, holidays

A selection of correspondence

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When is it a war?

Members of Congress may “regret their votes” on the second Gulf war, but faulty intelligence was not to blame (“Wauthorisation”, September 4th). The admittedly flawed estimate on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq influenced few votes. The Senate voted 77-23 to authorise the use of force. Only six senators actually read the estimate and another dozen were briefed. The key factor

Covid-19 data

We have read with interest the reports in *The Economist* and other media about the "global normalcy index", a tool that offers a framework to assess changes in behaviour associated with the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic in 50 of the world's largest economies.

It is very important to track the progress that those economies are making toward returning to pre-pandemic behaviour. However, it is striking that all eight criteria used to assess that progress are behaviours related strictly to the economy and not to the more complex behaviours found in sectors such as health.

Covid-19 shows that disease outbreaks can overwhelm entire health systems, leading to the loss of lives both as a direct result of the pandemic and indirectly because of disruption of routine health services. We believe that the indicators used to create the global normalcy index should address this reality.

For example, adding behaviours that are directly linked to public health interventions such as seeking and providing vaccines (through robust national immunisation programmes) would highlight a routine public health service that has been disrupted in many countries by the necessary emphasis on pandemic control. This would also emphasise the role that vaccination will have in reaching several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that the United Nations has outlined as a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. A third result would be a better baseline for assessing "normalcy". Such a baseline would be especially useful were the index extended to all economies and not only to the most powerful 50.

As it stands, the index criteria paint an incomplete picture of what normalcy should look like going forward. That partial view could be misleading to political leaders as they prioritise post-pandemic actions; their choices now will make a difference if and when the next emerging respiratory virus pandemic occurs. Those decisions will also shape the impact of the next seasonal influenza epidemic, particularly if it arises amid ongoing efforts to manage covid-19 and its variants.

Before the covid-19 pandemic, many economies, including some among the 50 most powerful measured by the index, faced a constant struggle to meet basic health requirements. During the pandemic it has become clear that each nation and region, no matter what the strength of its economy, is integral to our collective health security. As highlighted by the G20 High Level Independent Panel on Financing the Global Commons for Pandemic Preparedness and Response June 2021 report, resilient national systems remain the foundation for stopping an emerging outbreak.

We therefore suggest that the global normalcy index be extended to refer to all economies and that health-based criteria be added to the tool that is used to establish the index. Such criteria should capture the in-country status of vaccination programmes. The latter is especially important as we approach the next seasonal influenza outbreaks, hopefully with new and improved influenza vaccines, and would also help ensure the immunisations required to attain the SDGs.

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